

**'THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY,' A THRILLING DETECTIVE STORY. BY RODRIGUES OTTOLENCUI.**

regular detective work, by all means. Pardon the digression and proceed with your narrative."

Mr. Barnes felt slightly annoyed. He realized that Mr. Mitchell was depreciating his talents, placing him on the plane of the common thief taker, a plane which he knew that Mr. Mitchell considered a very low one intellectually. Nevertheless he did not even know wherein he had offended. Was it not true that the practical detective should confine himself to the immediate facts connected with the crime in hand, if he hoped to bring the wrongdoer to justice, rather than to make speculative pilgrimages into the remote past? He still believed so, yet it annoyed him to find that he was evidently at variance with Mr. Mitchell on this point, for, though he thought that gentleman egotistical in the highest degree, he fully appreciated his intellectual capabilities. He would now have preferred to discuss the question, but it was not easy to reopen the subject. Mr. Mitchell having dismissed the topic, this made him irritable, as he often was when in Mr. Mitchell's society, despite the uniform courtesy with which he was always treated. Mr. Barnes therefore found himself obliged to confine himself to the relation of his case.

"Well, then," began the detective after a pause, "about a week ago a most startling murder aroused the interest of the community. The victim was no less a man than Matthew Mora, a many times millionaire, prominent in Wall street banking circles as well as in Fifth avenue drawing rooms and conspicuous for his many deeds of philanthropy."

"How was the killing effected?"

"In a most brutally horrible manner. The old man was clubbed to death. This is not speculation, but fact. The murderer did not deign to hide the weapon, but left it upon the floor near the body. This was shrewd, because had he taken it away from the house its discovery might have been a clew which would have led us to a solution. But as it appears that the bluegeon was one of a collection of Indian implements of war owned by Mr. Mora its presence in the bedroom tells us nothing."

"Oh, yes, it tells you something!" interjected Mr. Mitchell. "Every known fact connected with a crime tells its quota of the truth and is therefore more important than the theoretical or circumstantial evidence which may be gathered."

"Of course I know that," said the detective testily. "What I mean is that the weapon left in the room, having belonged to the dead man, gives us no direct clew to the identity of the murderer. It does, however, tell us something, and it may even, however indirectly, point to the right man. For example, it is positive that the murderer did not bring this club with him. From this postulate there are two possible deductions—first, the man may not have intended murder when he entered the house; second, he may not have entered the house at all."

"Ah! Now you are doing better, Mr. Barnes," said Mr. Mitchell, with a pleasant smile.

"You mean that the criminal may have been an inmate of the house and therefore did not need to look for a weapon, being familiar with those at hand, eh?"

"Exactly. And this is the more plausible of the two theories because the Indian weapons were kept locked in a case in the library on the floor below Mr. Mora's bedchamber."

"This case was not broken open, I suppose?"

"No; but as the key was commonly in the lock this counts for nothing. The condition of the cabinet, however, together with the weapon used, furnishes us with another safe deduction. As you know, it is often difficult to decide whether a crime be premeditated or not. In this instance it was certainly planned."

"This is interesting. How do you prove it?"

"The cabinet, as I have said, is usually locked, though the key is left sticking. On the morning after the murder the door was found open. Thus it is evident that the master of the house had not himself taken the club to his room, for, being a man of exceedingly orderly habits, he would have locked the door. No; the murderer, knowing that a weapon of this kind was to be had, took it from the cabinet, but in his excited or abstracted frame of mind he might naturally have left the door open."

"You said awhile ago, Mr. Barnes, that the more plausible theory is that the criminal was an inmate of the house. This may be, but do not overlook the possibility that, coming from outside and planning against detection, the murderer may have chosen this weapon for the very reason that it would divert the attention of a detective away from himself and toward some other man. He would need, of course, to have knowledge of the existence of the Indian weapons and of the fact that they were within easy reach."

"He would also have needed the opportunity of entering the house and of escaping unobserved. Now, in the first place, the only way of getting into the house is through the front door, a large storage warehouse occupying all of the street at the back, and, secondly, Mr. Mora had a special night watchman patrolling the front of his premises."

"And this night watchman saw no one go in or come out of the house?"

"On the contrary, he saw a man do both. This man entered through the front door, using a latchkey, some time between 1 and 2 o'clock. He came out again about an hour later. But the watchman recognized him both times. It was Matthew Mora, Jr."

"The son?"

"The only son."

"And he, I suppose?"

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"That is suspicious."

"Very."

"Anything else against the young man?"

"He returned to the house at 5 o'clock in the morning, differently dressed and—"

"Differently dressed, you say?"

"Yes. Of this the watchman is positive."

"That ought to be significant."

"I should say so. He went in, but within a few minutes he emerged again in great excitement. Passing the watchman, he exclaimed: 'My father has been murdered! Let no one enter the house until I return.'"

"And then?"

"Then he went directly to the police station and reported the case."

"A clever young man!"

"You will continue to hold that view the more you hear. Two policemen were detailed to return to the house with him, and the central office was notified, so that within an hour experienced detectives were on the spot. One of these, my friend Mr. Burrows, was kind enough to stop for me and ask me to accompany him, so that I was present at the first official investigation."

"You were fortunate."

"Yes. I always dislike to take up a case after others have moved things about and tramped over the scene of the tragedy. We found the room in great disorder, furniture overturned, the rugs about the room in tangled heaps where the struggling men must have kicked them about, bric-a-brac strewn on the floor and broken—in fact, every evidence to prove that the old man had yielded up his life only after a desperate encounter with his assailant."

"Was he a powerful man? You said he was old."

"Old is a figure of speech. He was something over 50, but he had been an athlete in his youth and could give a good account of himself in a boxing bout at any time. If his son was the murderer, the men were evenly matched. He is not so heavy as his father was, but he is sinewy and has muscles of steel. I found Mr. Mora's watch under the bed, where it must have been knocked from the dressing table. The fall had caused it to stop, and the hands indicated 7 minutes of 2, agreeing with the time during which the watchman testifies that young Mora was at home."

"Yes," said Mr. Mitchell, "but do not go too fast. The watch may have run down. It is uncommon for a good watch to stop merely because it falls to the floor."

"Both of your points are good in theory," replied the detective, "but neither applies in this instance. If a watch runs down, it cannot be started again without winding. By merely shaking this one I set it going, and to make assurance doubly sure I let it run for an hour, when it was still keeping time. Next, though it be true that most watches would not be so easily stopped, this one, for some reason, is very sensitive to a blow. I tried the experiment of pushing it from the table to the floor, and at every attempt I found that it would cease its movement."

"You certainly have been thorough on this point," admitted Mr. Mitchell, "and I presume we may consider it established that the first attack upon Mr. Mora occurred at or near 2 o'clock."

"During the hour when the watchman claims that young Mora was at home," added Mr. Barnes.

"The watchman's testimony must be remembered, certainly," said Mr. Mitchell.

"Of course," continued the detective, "the first theory in these cases is naturally that of the midnight marauder in search of plunder, but a careful examination showed that nothing had been abstracted, though various articles of furniture, and especially Mr. Mora's writing desk, had been ransacked. I ought to mention that an open package containing several thousand dollars in notes was conspicuously in view in a small drawer and was untouched."

"Untouched? Is not that merely a presumption? Why may not this shrewd criminal have taken half or two-thirds of the cash fund, leaving the rest, as he did the club, to bail."

"I have said that Mr. Mora was most methodical. We found a notebook in which was entered from time to time a detailed account of his worldly possessions. This included a statement of the cash balances in various banks and the cash on hand. Under a date two days previous to the murder is an entry giving the balance of cash on hand, which is only a hundred dollars more than the amount of the notes found in his desk."

"Well, then, if not money, what did the murderer seek in the desk which you say was ransacked?"

"Why not the will?"

"Ah, of course, the will! Do you know that there was a will?"

"His lawyers declare that they made one for him recently—within a month, in fact. He bequeathed one half of his fortune to his son, and the other half was distributed among various charitable institutions."

"What was the total?"

"It is estimated that the fortune amounts to 18 millions."

"One-half of which is nine millions," mused Mr. Mitchell, "enough, quite enough, to be considered an incentive for murder—a legal incentive, I mean."

"Yes. The will cannot be found, and if not found charity loses and young Mora gains nine millions. Now we come to another point. We—that is, I—found blood stains upon the young man's clothing."

"Did I not understand you to say that he came back to the house in different clothing?"

"That could only apply to his outer

garments, for of course the watchman could not observe whether he had changed his underwear. The blood stains were on the wristband of his shirt and on the sleeve of the right arm."

"Did you call his attention to this?"

"I did. For an instant he seemed disconcerted, but quickly recovered himself. Then he claimed the stains got on his shirt when he examined his father's body and was feeling his breast to see whether life was extinct."

"He is a clever young man, Mr. Barnes."

"You said so before, and I told you that you would not alter your opinion. But I next asked him to explain how it happened that blood was upon the wristband while none showed upon his cuffs?"

"Of course—a good point. He might have changed his cuffs when he changed his other clothing. That was your idea, was it not? How did he answer?"

"He said he had been away from home all night."

"Away from home all night?"

"So he claimed, and that, returning about 5 in the morning, he had first thought of retiring and had thrown off his coat and removed his cuffs when a light burning in his father's room at-

by him who came out, for, oddly enough, the plaid suit is missing."

"And young Mora says that the murderer may have taken it. Well, it is a very believable proposition."

"Believable," returned Mr. Barnes hotly. "Yes; that is the worst of it. They have believed it—the citizen's jury, I mean."

"Ah! Matters have proceeded as far as that, have they?"

"Yes. The full account of yesterday's proceedings is in the morning paper. You may read it."

"No," said Mr. Mitchell. "I would rather have you read it to me."

Mr. Barnes turned, so that the light from the window fell across his paper, and read the following:

"THE MORA MYSTERY—THE INQUEST BRINGS NO SOLUTION—THE SON ACQUITTED."

"The inquest in the Mora case ended yesterday, the jury bringing in the usual commonplace verdict. 'Died from wounds inflicted by parties unknown.' Thus, despite the many hints that the district attorney and the detectives had discovered damaging evidence against young Matthew Mora, nothing has been proved. The evidence offered was entirely speculative and theoretical, and the jury rightly declined to cast a stain upon the young man's character upon such flimsy testimony. The main points upon which the police relied were the discovery of blood upon the young man's sleeve and the positive assertion of the watchman that he had been seen dressed in a plaid suit, known to be his, entering and leaving the house at or near 1 o'clock. The first point Mr. Mora easily disposed of by openly admitting that the blood was that of his father and that he had been smeared with it while examining the corpse to ascertain whether the heart might not be beating. He denied the alleged visit to the house, as claimed by the watchman, and candidly confessed that he did not know what had become of the missing suit of clothing. He suggested, however, that the murderer may have worn it over his own blood stained garments when leaving the house, a theory that was evidently acceptable to the jury. This might not have been had not Mr. Mora satisfactorily accounted for his time during the night. It seems that he has been taking an interest lately in the east side slums and has been studying the labor problem. On the night of the murder he attended a ball at Apollo hall, hoping by associating with the inhabitants of the section to gain a closer insight into their needs, and thus perhaps later on to apply the money which he knew would be his and which has now come to him so unexpectedly toward alleviating the distress of the poor slum dwellers. In support of this story he produced two witnesses who testified that he was at Apollo hall throughout the ball, dancing with some of the fair Jewish maidens and making merry with the men. They declare that he did not leave for home until about 4 o'clock, which tallies nicely with the time of his actual arrival there."

"Too nicely!" growled the detective. "I need not read further. The reporter seems to be making an effort to whitewash young Mora, for the rest of the article is devoted to sounding his praises. You may look it over later if you like."

"Thank you. I will," said Mr. Mitchell, taking the paper. "Now, then, what can I do for you in this case? What course will you pursue?"

"Well, the police put forward the theory that Mora is the murderer. The coroner's jury has virtually knocked their theory into a cocked hat. I have noted that in cases of this sort the police make little further effort, and by degrees the details are forgotten by the public, who seize upon the next crime served up to satisfy their appetite for the sensational. Thus the murderer escapes. But in this instance he shall not escape. If it be young Mora, I will bring the crime home to him in return for his insolent language to me. If it be some other person, why, I shall be equally well serving the ends of justice by discovering the truth."

"Yes, but beware, Mr. Barnes! For the first time since I have had the honor of your acquaintance you allow personal feeling to enter into your investigation of a case. Young Mora has been insolent to you, but that would not justify you in weaving a web of circumstantial evidence around him which will blast his reputation forever, even if it do not bring him to the gallows."

"I hope I am above that sort of thing," said Mr. Barnes, flushing deeply. "I am sure."

"So am I—sure that you are above it. You will do your best to discover the truth, only a personal spite is a dangerous element in such investigations. I merely call your attention to the existence of the viper that you may crush it with your heel. But you ask me to aid you in this affair. It may surprise you to hear me say that I cannot go into the case as you desire."

"I am more than surprised. I am sorely disappointed," said the detective.

"Oh, it is not so bad as that!" added Mr. Mitchell quickly. "I may be of some use to you. You see, the truth is, Mr. Barnes, I am not exactly a detective by trade. I mean no offense, but I cannot look at these cases from your standpoint. With you a crime committed indicates that there is a criminal at large. That criminal must be discovered, imprisoned, perhaps hanged. That is your work. It is a work with which I can have no sort of sympathy."

"But I have thought that these investigations interested you."

Mr. Barnes was much astonished at Mr. Mitchell's words.

"Ah! Indeed the investigation of a mystery is interesting to me, especially where the use of brains, and more particularly of brains against brains, enters into the work. But the study of a murder case, with the single object

of hanging the murderer, is not attractive to me."

"Surely you do not mean that murderers should go unpunished?"

"No; perhaps that would not be a wise course. But to me it seems that the arrest, conviction and hanging of a specified murderer are matters of absolutely no importance and of no effect in abating the tendency toward crime, which is such a conspicuous characteristic of mankind. As I hinted awhile ago, when you said that I went too deep for you, I can almost believe that it is of more utility to study the causes which have made a given crime possible than to capture and kill the criminal. We think that we have thus got rid of him. We have put him away, out of the world. We have ended his career. Ah! But have we? Can we be sure that his crime will not breed another crime as a direct sequence to the one for which he is punished? And do we know whether his punishment will advance or check the tendency toward crime which he has left as a heritage to his offspring? These are questions of more interest to me, Mr. Barnes, than the killing of the man who killed Mr. Mora."

"But surely, I must repeat," said Mr. Barnes, "you would not advise that crimes should go unpunished?"

"Perhaps I might when I am wiser, you know," Mr. Mitchell laughed and once again abruptly changed the subject. "However, Mr. Barnes, since you have so far as I will lend you my assistance."

"You will?" exclaimed Mr. Barnes eagerly.

"I will, 'and there's my hand on it,' as the song says. No! No! No thanks are necessary. Who knows? As I said before, perhaps your affair may be connected with mine, after all, in which case I would but be advancing my own interests in aiding you."

"Do you mean that you have found some connection between the killing of Mr. Mora and—"

"Perhaps! I only say perhaps! Do not press me to commit myself further. And now give me 24 hours in which to study the case, will you?"

Mr. Barnes accepted the hint to go, and after cordially thanking Mr. Mitchell for his promised assistance he went away lighter hearted. With Mr. Mitchell co-operating he thought that only a few days would be needed to bring him to the truth.

After his departure Mr. Mitchell took up the newspaper, intending to read over the report of the inquest, when his eye rested upon a headline in the next column, which caused him to read the following:

"BRUTAL TREATMENT OF A CHILD. The Metropolitan Foundling society have just had their attention drawn to a case which is peculiarly monstrous in its cruelty. It appears that one of their agents on his regular tour through the east side was notified by the policeman on duty that a baby had been abandoned near by. Upon investigation the agent found that a row of tenements backed upon a small burial ground which, of course, had not been used for interments for many years and is therefore rarely opened. Into this graveyard some fiend had thrown a girl baby, about a year old, and there left it, in a fitting place to starve to death. The infant when discovered was entirely naked, so that there was nothing about it which could serve as a means of identification. Inquiry among the inhabitants of the tenements elicited the fact that for four days the child had been seen crawling about in the grass, playing among the headstones, yet no one had found time to investigate the affair, though some one had thrown bits of bread and crackers to the poor little baby, which it ravenously seized upon and devoured. To those living in up town streets, dwelling in comfortable if not luxurious homes, it may seem incredible that this infant could be thus left for so many days with no one to go to its rescue. But these poor folks are themselves high starvation, working long, dreary hours under the killing influence of the dread sweatshop, with masters correcting them for a moment's idleness. Such as these have their better feelings dulled; such as these have no time to wonder whose baby this waif might be or whether, after all, it may not have belonged to some one near by who would claim it before nightfall. Indeed the wonder is that such as these even had the thought to throw food to the little one creeping about in the grass. But the horror is that any human being could abandon a child to such a fate as only chance saved this tot from suffering. The fiend should be found and punished."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Mitchell, laying aside his paper—"found and punished! That is the final, the only, way that society has of disposing of such cases. Mr. Barnes would approve. And what of the next case? Why, the same treatment, of course—arrest and punish. But the reporter here has lifted a corner of the veil and given us a glimpse of the sweatshop. There they are manufacturing coats. Are they making anything else?" He took up the paper and read the article through once more, and as he put it down he exclaimed:

"Horrible, monstrous! And yet Mr. Barnes thinks that the killing of Mr. Mora is the crime of the century. Ah, well, we shall widen the scope of your views some day, Mr. Barnes!"

CHAPTER II.

"UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH"—PINCERS.

A half hour later Mr. Mitchell entered the office of the Metropolitan Foundling society and from one of the clerks obtained further information relative to the founding. The address of a woman who had first reported the case, as well as her name, Gertrude Griffin, was given to him, and upon his request he was permitted to see the little waif, who was snugly tucked away in a cot on the floor above.

Mr. Mitchell was entering the up-

per room he met an acquaintance in the hallway. This was Colonel Payton, one of the directors of the society.

The colonel was a large man, with a fine head and commanding mien. His hair was whitening, and his long side whiskers, already white, made him look older than he really was. During the late civil war he had served his country faithfully and had earned his epaulets by bravery on the field, having risen from the ranks to the position which he held when his command had been mustered out. Returning to New York after the war, he settled down to the peaceful occupation of making money, and by fortunate speculations in Wall street and investments in real estate he had placed himself far above the need of further effort.

Therefore he had retired from active business and for several years had devoted his time to church and charity. In this manner he had earned the reputation of being a useful member of society, a philanthropist who gave freely, yet who deprecated indiscriminate almsgiving, believing that the best good was to be attained by helping others to help themselves. He had therefore allied himself with several associations having the betterment of the poor as their aim.

Personally he was an exceedingly genial and pleasant companion until you differed with him on one of his principles of life, when he would show his New England ancestry, being very "set." He was a bachelor, and some said that he was a woman hater, which was denied by others, who declared that he eschewed the society of the opposite sex because he had unsuccessfully wooed one whom he had wished to make his bride. However this may have been, whenever the colonel did choose to honor a social gathering with his presence he was sure of a warm reception. His evenings were usually spent at his club, where he was a conspicuous figure at the whist table, and, whether or not he was a favorite with the ladies, certain it was that he was honored and even courted by his own sex as a bon vivant and a raconteur of rare ability.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Mitchell!" exclaimed the colonel, recognizing that gentleman. "I thought you were on the other side."

"I have just returned by the Paris," said Mr. Mitchell. "I see you are on your rounds. Inspecting one of your favorite charities?"

"Well, hardly that," said the colonel, with a laugh. "I don't allow my charities, as you call them, to take up all of my time. But there is a case in hand at present to which I shall give my personal attention. Perhaps you have read of the horror in the morning papers?"

"Do you mean that little naked baby found in the graveyard?"

Mr. Mitchell was pleased to find that his companion was interested in this case, as he counted upon his garrulousness to obtain more of the facts than had escaped from the official mouth, sealed with red tape, which he had met below stairs.

"Yes," replied the colonel. "That is a monstrous affair. Think of a mother throwing a baby less than a year old into a graveyard and leaving it there to starve. I intend to find that woman and—"

"How do you know it was the mother?" asked Mr. Mitchell quietly. "It may have been the father who thus wished to rid himself of a burdensome offspring."

"Of course, of course!" said the colonel, irritated by the interruption, as well as by the suggestion that he might be in error. "But what difference does

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"That make? Mother or father, it is all the same to me. I will hunt down the culprit and see that full punishment is meted out."

"Punishment, always punishment!" thought Mr. Mitchell. "How eagerly society punishes! How little it does to prevent!" Then he added aloud:

"What would be your idea of a fitting punishment, colonel?"

"I am sorry to say that my ideas and the law do not agree on that point. The law allots seven years in the penitentiary for abandonment of a child. But in this case there was an evident intent to kill. Otherwise the infant would have been placed on a doorstep or rather conspicuous spot where it should be found. If I had my way, I would give the guilty party 20 years at least."

"What good would that do?" asked Mr. Mitchell. He said it so quickly and the words were such a surprise to the colonel that the latter was non-plussed for a moment, and then he blurted out excitedly:

"What good would it do? It would teach him a lesson and others as well, wouldn't it? It would show people of this class that if they have children they must care for them or go to prison, wouldn't it?"

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