

My Strangest Case

BY GUY BOOTHBY.

Author of "DR. NIKOLA," "THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL," "PHAROS, THE EGYPTIAN," Etc.

(Continued from last week.)

SYNOPSIS.

PART I.—Three rogues, Hayle, Kitwater and Codd, meet at Singapore. Latter two have learned of existence of hidden treasure at Senkor-Wat—old Burmese ruin near Chinese border. Hayle only half-believer, but nevertheless agrees to join in search.

PART II.—Reaching Senkor-Wat, the men make their way through the ancient streets and toward the once splendid palace. Toward dusk after a most tedious search they come upon secret entrance to underground vault, in which are discovered great quantities of bar gold and uncut rubies and sapphires. Hayle fills both hands with gems and the men make their way outside again. On reaching camp they find their two Burmese servants slain and horribly mutilated, Chinese fashion. During the night, Hayle secures treasure and steals away into the jungle.

PART III.—Utterly exhausted and unconscious, Hayle is found by English officers near frontier station of Nampoung. As soon as able he leaves for Rangong and thence to England.

PART IV.—Two months later another officer at Nampoung, while out on a hunt comes across Kitwater and Codd. Kitwater explains they were traders who had fallen into hands of Chinese who had put out his own eyes and pulled out Codd's tongue. After recovering somewhat from effects of exposure and tortures they set off in pursuit of Hayle.

CHAPTER I.—George Fairfax relates how he became a detective in Australia and finally came to open up an office in London.

At the conclusion of this case I resigned my position in the police of the northern colony, and joined the detective staff in Melbourne, seeing in their service a good deal of queer life and ferreting out not a small number of extraordinary cases. The experience gained there was invaluable, and led me, after one particularly interesting piece of business in which I had the good fortune to be most successful, to entertain the notion of quitting government employ altogether, and setting up for myself. I did so, and soon had more work upon my hands than I could very well accomplish. But I was too ambitious to be content with small things, and eventually came to the conclusion that there was not enough scope in the colonies for me. After 15 years' absence, therefore, I returned to England, spending a year in the further east en route in order to enlarge my experience, and to qualify myself for any work that might come to me from that quarter.

On a certain bitterly cold day in January I reached Liverpool from the United States, and took the train for my old home. My father and mother had long since died, and now all that remained to me of them was the stone slab that covered their resting place in the quiet little churchyard at the foot of the hill.

"Well, here I am," I said to myself, "33 years old and alone in the world. Nobody knows me in England, but it won't be my fault if they don't hear of George Fairfax before very long. I'll be off to London and try my fortune there."

Next day I made my way to the great metropolis, and installed myself at a small private hotel, while I looked about me preparatory to commencing business. To talk of gaining a footing in London is all very well in its way, but it is by no means so easy a task to accomplish as it might appear. Doubtless it can be done fairly quickly if one is prepared to spend large sums of money in advertising, and is not afraid to blow one's own trumpet on every possible occasion, but that is not my line, and besides, even had I so wished, I had not the money to do it. For a multitude of reasons I did not feel inclined to embark my hard-earned savings on such a risky enterprise. I preferred to make my way by my own diligence, and with that end in view I rented an office in a convenient quarter, furnished it, put a small advertisement in a few of the papers, and then awaited the coming of my clients.

As I have a long and curious story to tell, and this book is only intended to be the narration of a certain episode in my life, a detailed description of my first three years in London would not only be superfluous, but in every way a waste of time. Let it suffice that my first case was that of the now notorious Pilchard street diamond robbery, my success in which brought me business from a well-known firm in Hatton Gardens. As the public will doubtless remember, they had been robbed of some valuable gems between London and Amsterdam in a singularly audacious manner. My second was the case of the celebrated Russian swindler, who called herself Countess Demikoff. This case alone took me nearly six months to unravel, but I did not grudge the time, seeing that I managed to succeed where the police had failed. From that time forward I think I may say without boasting that I have been as successful as any man of my age has a right to expect to be. What is better still, I am now in the happy position of being able to accept or decline business as I choose. It is in many respects a hard life, and at all times is attended with a fair amount of risk, but you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and if anyone chooses to spend his life running to earth men who are waging war against society, well, he must not grumble if he receives some hard knocks in return.

After these preliminaries I will proceed to show how I came to be mixed up in the most curious case it has ever been my good or evil, fortune to encounter. It showed me a side of human nature I had not met before, and it brought me the greatest happiness

a man can ever hope to find.

CHAPTER II.

All business London, and a good many other people besides, must remember the famous United States Em-pire bank fraud. Bonds had been stolen and negotiated, vast sums of money were discovered to be missing, and the manager and one of the directors were absent also. So cleverly had the affair been worked, and so glaring were the defalcations, that had it not been for the public-spirited behavior and generosity of two of the directors, the position of the bank would have been most seriously compromised, if not shattered altogether. How the culprits had managed to slip through the fingers of the law in the first place no one could say, but the fact remains that they were able to get out of England, without, apparently, leaving a trace of their intentions or their whereabouts behind them. Scotland Yard took the matter up with its usual promptness, and at first were confident of success. They set their cleverest detectives to work upon it, and it was not until more than a month had elapsed that the men engaged were compelled most reluctantly to admit their defeat. They had done their best; it was the system under which they worked that was to blame. In the detection of crime, or in the tracing of a criminal, it is best, as in every other walk of life, to be original.

One morning on arriving at my office I found a letter awaiting me from the remaining directors of the bank, in which they inquired if I could make it convenient to call upon them at the head-office that day. To tell the truth, I had been expecting this summons for nearly a week, and was far from being displeased when it came. The work I had expected them to offer me was after my own heart, and if they would only trust the business to me and give me a free hand, I was prepared on my part to bring the missing gentlemen to justice.

Needless to say, I called upon them at the hour specified, and after a brief wait was conducted to the board room, where the directors sat in solemn conclave.

The chairman, Sir Walter Bracebridge, received me on behalf of his colleagues.

"We wrote to you, Mr. Fairfax," he said, "in order to find out whether you could help us concerning the difficulty in which we find ourselves placed: You of course are aware of the serious trouble the bank has experienced, and of the terrible consequences which have resulted therefrom?"

I admitted that I was quite conversant with it, and waited to hear what he would have to say next.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "we have sent for you to know whether you can offer us any assistance in our hour of difficulty? Pray take a chair, and let us talk the matter over, and see what conclusion we can arrive at."

I seated myself, and we discussed the affair to such good purpose that, when I left the board room, it was on the understanding that I was to take up the case at once, and that my expenses and a very large sum of money should be paid me, provided I could manage to bring the affair to a successful termination. I spent the remainder of that day at the bank, carefully studying the various memoranda. A great deal of what I had read and heard had been mere hearsay, and this it was necessary to discard in order that the real facts of the case might be taken up, and the proper conclusions drawn therefrom. For three days I weighed the case carefully in my mind, and at the end of that time was in a position to give the board a definite answer to their inquiries. Thereupon I left England, with the result that exactly 12 weeks later the two men, so much wanted, were at Bow street, and I had the proud knowledge of knowing that I had succeeded where the men who had tried before me had so distinctly failed.

As will be remembered, it was a case that interested every class of society, and press and public were alike united in the interest they showed in it. It is not, however, the trial itself as much as another curious circumstance connected with it that has induced me to refer to it here. The case had passed from the magistrate's court to the Old Bailey, and was hourly increasing in interest. Day after day the court was crowded to overflowing, and when the time came for me to take my place in the witness-box and describe the manner in which I had led up to and effected the capture of the offenders, the excitement rose to fever heat. I can see the whole scene now as if it had occurred but yesterday; the learned judge upon the bench, the jury in their box, the rows of counsels, and the benches full of interested spectators. I gave my evidence and was examined by the counsels for the prosecution and for the defense. I described how I had traced the men from England to their hiding-place abroad, and the various attempts that had been made to prevent their extradition, and had just referred to a certain statement one of the prisoners had made to me soon after his arrest when an interruption caused me to look behind at the rows of spectators. At the further end of the bench, nearest me, were two men; one was evidently tall, the other very short. The

taller was the possessor of silvery white hair and a long and venerable beard. He was a handsome-looking man, of about 40, and my first glance at him told me that he was blind. As I have said, his companion was a much smaller man; with a smooth, almost boyish face, a pair of twinkling eyes, but a mouth rather hard set. Both were evidently following the case closely, and when on the next day I saw that they were in the same place I took an even greater interest in them than before. It was not, however, until the trial had finished and the pair of miserable men had been sent to penal servitude for a lengthy term of years, that I made the acquaintance of the men I have just described. Remember the



"YOU ARE MR. FAIRFAX, ARE YOU NOT?" INQUIRED THE TALLER OF THE MEN.

circumstance quite distinctly. I had left the court and was proceeding down the Old Bailey in the direction of Ludgate Hill, when I heard my name pronounced.

Turning round I discovered to my astonishment the two men I had seen in the court, and who had seemed to take such an interest in the case. The smaller was guiding his friend along the crowded pavement with a dexterity that was plainly the outcome of a long practice. When I stopped, they stopped also, and the blind man addressed me. His voice was deep, and had a note of pathos in it impossible to describe. It may have been that I was a little sad that afternoon, for both the men who had been condemned to penal servitude had wives and children, to whose pitiful condition the learned judge had referred when passing sentence.

"You are Mr. Fairfax, are you not?" inquired the taller of the men.

"That is my name," I admitted.

"What can I do for you?"

"If we could persuade you to vouchsafe us an hour of your valuable time, we should be more grateful than we could say," the man replied. "We have an important piece of business which it might possibly be to your advantage to take up. At any rate, it would be worthy of your consideration."

"But why have you not come to me before?" I inquired. "You have seen me in court every day. Why do you wait until the case is at an end?"

"Because we wanted to be quite sure of you," he answered. "Our case is so large and of such vital importance to us, that we did not desire to run any risk of losing you. We thought we would wait and familiarize ourselves with all that you have done in this affair before coming to you. Now we are satisfied that we could not place our case in better hands, and what we are anxious to do is to induce you to interest yourself in it and take it up."

"You pay me a very high compliment," I said, "but I cannot give you a decision at once. I must hear what it is that you want me to do and have time to think it over, before I can answer you. That is my invariable rule, and I never depart from it. Do you know my office?"

"We know it perfectly," returned the blind man. "It would be strange if we did not, seeing that we have stood outside it repeatedly, trying to summon up courage to enter. Would it be possible for you to grant us an interview to-night?"

"I fear not," I said. "I am tired, and stand in need of rest. If you care to come to-morrow morning, I shall be very pleased to see you. But you must bear in mind the fact that my time is valuable, and that it is only a certain class of cases that I care to take up personally."

"We are not afraid of our case," the man replied. "I doubt if there has ever been another like it. If fancy you yourself will say so when you hear the evidence I have to offer. It is not as if we were destitute. We are prepared to pay you well for your services, but we must have the very best that England can supply."

My readers must remember that this conversation was carried on at the corner of Ludgate Hill and the Old Bailey. Curious glances were being thrown at my companions by passers-by, and so vehement were the tall man's utterances becoming that a small crowd was gradually collecting in our neighborhood.

"Very well," I said, "if you are really desirous of consulting me, I shall be very glad to see you at my office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I must ask you, however, not to be late, as I have several other appointments."

They seemed delighted that I had given them an appointment, but for my part I am afraid I was too absorbed by the memories of the day, and the punishment that had been allotted to the two principal members in the swindle, to think very much of them and their business. Indeed, although I made a note of the appointment, it was not until I had arrived at the office on the following morning that I recollected their promised visit. I had just finished my correspondence, and had directed a few letters to my managing clerk, when a junior entered with two cards, which he placed before me. The first I took up bore the name of Septimus Codd, that of the second, Mr. George Kitwater. When I had finished the letter I was in the act of dictating, I bade the clerk admit them, and a moment later the blind man and his companion whom I had seen on Ludgate Hill the previous evening were ushered into my presence. I cannot remember a more venerable appearance than that presented by the taller man. His was a personality that would have appealed forcibly to any student of humanity. It was decidedly an open countenance, to which the long white beard that descended almost to his waist gave an added reverence. His head was well shaped and well set upon his shoulders, his height was six feet two if an inch, and he carried himself with the erectness of a man accustomed to an outdoor life. He was well dressed, and for that reason I surmised that he was the possessor of good manners. His companion was as much below the middle height as he was above it. His was a peculiar countenance resembling that of a boy when seen at a distance, and that of an old man when one was close to him. His eyes, as I have already said, were small, and they were set deep in his head. This, in itself, was calculated to add to his peculiar appearance. He steered his blind companion into the room and placed him in a seat. Then he perched himself on a chair beside him and waited for me to open the debate.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," I said. "Allow me to congratulate you on your punctuality."

"We were afraid of missing you," observed Kitwater. "Our business is so particular that we did not want to run any risk of losing our appointment."

"Perhaps you will now be good enough to tell me what that business is?" I replied, taking my note book out of a drawer, preparatory to writing down what they had to say.

"In the first place, sir," the man began, "we of course understand that everything we have to tell you will be regarded by you as strictly private and confidential?"

"That goes without saying," I replied. "If I were to divulge what my clients tell me, my business would not be worth a day's purchase. You can rest assured that everything you may impart to me will be treated in strictest confidence."

"We thank you," said Kitwater. "The story I have to tell you is perhaps the strangest that has ever been told to mortal man. To begin with, you must understand that my companion and myself have but lately arrived in England. We have been for many years missionaries in China, sowing the good seed in the western provinces. I do not know whether you have ever visited that country, but, even if you have not, you must be aware to some extent of the dangers to which our calling is subjected. We carry our lives in our hands from the moment we leave civilization until we enter it again. There are times, however, that compensate one for all the trials that have to be undergone."

"You must excuse me," I said, "if I remind you that my time is valuable, and that, however interested I may be in the missionary work of China, I cannot allow it to interfere with my business. The sooner you tell me in what way you want me to help you, the sooner I shall be able to give you the answer you are seeking."

"I must implore your pardon," the man continued, humbly enough. "I am afraid our calling, however, is apt to make us a trifle verbose. If you will allow me I will put what I have to say in as few words as possible."

I bowed and signed to him to proceed.

"Our case is as follows," he began. "As I have told you, we have been in China for several years, and during that time we have had the good fortune to enroll not a few well-known names among our converts. To make a long story short, we were so successful as to be able to persuade even the mandarin of the province to listen to our message. He was an enormously rich man, one of the richest, perhaps, in China, and was so impressed by the good news we brought to him that, on his death-bed, he left to us for the benefit of the mission all his wealth in gold, silver and precious stones. It was a princely legacy, and one that would have enabled us to carry on our mission with such success as we had never dreamed of."

"But if you were so lucky and so much in love with your profession, how does it come about that you are in England now?" I inquired.

"I will tell you why," he answered, leaning toward me and tapping with his fingers upon the edge of the writing-table. "It is a sad story, and the mere telling of it causes me more pain than you would believe. You must understand that at the time of the mandarin's death an English traveler, who had been passing through the western provinces, reached our city and took up his abode with us. Needless to say, we were overwhelmed with grief at the loss of our patron. The treasure he had presented us with we took to the mission and deposited it in a safe place. We had no suspicion of any sort of treachery. I fear my

companion and I are not men of the world, that is to say we do not go about suspecting evil of our neighbors."

"I think I understand," I said. "You brought the treasure home, put it in what you considered a safe place, and one day awoke to find your estimable guest missing and the treasure gone with him. Have I guessed correctly?"

[Continued next week.]

Money! Money! Money! We have large amount of money to loan on farm lands at low rates.

FARMERS INSURE
in the
FARMERS' MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY

of Little Falls, Minn.
The cost to come in is only 40c per \$100.00 insured and \$1.00 policy fee.
You can notify the following directors and they will take your application:
Peter Nylen and John Thelander-Randall.
John Broberg-Pike Creek.
John G. Boivie-Culdrum.
P. A. Kull-Green Prairie.
B. W. Miller and John G. Olson-Belle Prairie.

You can also notify John A. Nelson, Little Falls, assistant secretary.
Insure in your own company and save money.

MONEY TO LOAN
We have an unlimited amount of money to loan on improved farms and city property.

FIRST NATIONAL BANK.

Where to - Locate
W. J. W. in the territory
traveled by the
Louisville
and Nashville
Railroad.

Great Central Southern Trunk Line.
-IN-
KENTUCKY, TENNESSEE, ALABAMA,
MISSISSIPPI, FLORIDA,

-WHERE-
Farmers, Fruit Growers, Stock Raisers,
Manufacturers, Investors, Speculators
and Money Lenders

will find the great chance in the United States to make "big money" by reason of the abundance and cheapness of

Land and Farms, Timber and Stone, Iron and Coal, Labor—Everything!

Free sites, financial assistance, and freedom from taxation for the manufacturer. Land and farms at \$1.00 per acre and upwards, and 50,000 acres in West Florida that can be taken gratis under the U. S. Homestead laws. Stock raising in the Gul Coast District will make enormous profits.

Half fare excursions the first and third Tuesdays of each month.
Let us know what you want, and we will tell you where and how to get it—but don't delay, as the country is filling up rapidly. Printed matter, maps and all information free. Address R. J. WEMYSS, General Immigration and Industrial Agent, Louisville, Ky.

... Smoke the ...
Minnesota Pioneer,
J. C. FETHERSPIL, Manf.

Farm Property Insured.

I have made arrangements whereby I can insure farm property in the Citizens Fire Association of Mankato. Call on or address
E. W. COLLINS,
Little Falls, Minn.

MILWAUKEE BINDERS and MOWERS.
RAKES AND OTHER FARM IMPLEMENTS
BEST MACHINERY MADE

..... For Sale by.....
JOHN ANDERSON,
West Side, Little Falls, Minn.

NOTICE to FARMERS

The Little Falls Packing Company will pay you the highest market price for all your Fat Cattle, Sheep, Lambs and Poultry.

Little Falls Packing Co.,
Little Falls, Minn.