morning; it was her duty to see that it was shut and fastened before drawing the curtains. Just at present one can scarcely be too careful. I don't mean to deny that whether there was a window open or not a burglar who wanted to get into the house could do so, still there is no use in making their work more easy for them. I know, as a rule, we are careless about such things; there has not been a burglary in this part for years, and until lately the front door has never been locked at night, and anyone could have walked in who wanted to. Of course the servants don't know that there is any reason for being more careful at present than usual.

"I was thinking the other day of having shutters put to all these downstair rooms. Some of them have got them, and some have not; still, even with shutters, burglars can always get in if they want to do so. They have only to cut round the lock of a door or to make a hole in a panel to give them room to put an arm through and draw back a bolt, and the thing is done. I know that all the silver is locked up every night in the safe, for Ramoo sees to that, and I have never known him neglect anything under his charge. Well, Mark, I don't know that it is any use sitting up longer, we have plenty of time to talk the matter over; it is four years yet before Millicent comes of age, though, of course, there is nothing to prevent your setting out in quest of the treasure as soon as you like. Still, there is no hurry about it."

"None whatever, father; but I don't mean to lose a day before I try to get on the track of that villain Bastow."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARK was some hours before he went to sleep. The news that he had heard that evening was strange and startling. Full of health and strength, the fact that he was not, as he had always supposed, the heir to the estate troubled him not at all. The fact that in four years he would come in for some twelve thousand pounds was sufficient to prevent his feeling any uneasiness as to his future; and indeed in some respects it was not an unpleasant idea that, instead of being tied down to the estate, he should be able to wander at will, visit foreign countries, and make his own life.

In one respect he was sorry. His father had in the last year hinted more than once that it would be a very nice arrangement if he were to make up a match with his ward; he had laughed, and said that there would be plenty of time for that yet. But the idea had been an agreeable one. He was very fond of Millicent—fond, perhaps, in a cousinly way at present; but at any rate he liked her far better than any of the sisters of his friends. Of course she was only seventeen yet, and there was plenty of time to think of marriage in another three years. Still, the thought occurred to him several times that she was budding out into a young woman, and every month added to her attractions. It was but the day before he had said to himself that there was no reason to wait as long as three years, especially as his father seemed anxious, and would evidently be glad were the match to take place. Now, of course, he said to himself, that was at an end.

He had never given her any reason to suppose that he cared for her, and now that she was the heiress and he comparatively poor, she would naturally think that it was for the estate, and not for herself, that she was wooed.

Then there was the question of this curiously lost treasure, with the mysterious clew that led to nothing. How on earth was he to set about the quest? He puzzled for a long time over this, till at last he fell asleep. He was roused by Ramoo entering the room.

"What is it, Ramoo?"

"Me not know, sahib. Massa Thorndyke's door shut. Me no able to make him hear."

"That is curious, Ramoo," Mark said, jumping hastily out of bed. "I will be with you in a minute." He slipped on his trousers, coat, and slippers, and then accompanied Ramoo to his father's door. He knocked again and again, and each time more loudly, his face growing paler as he did so. Then he threw himself against the door, but it was solid and heavy.

"Fetch me an ax, Ramoo," he said. "There is something wrong here."

Ramoo returned in a short time with two men-servants and with the ax in his hands. Mark took it, and with a few mighty blows split the woodwork, and then hurling himself against the door, it yielded. As he entered the room a cry broke from his lips. Within a pace or two of the bed the Squire lay on the ground, on his face, and a deep stain on the carpet at once showed that his death had been a violent one. Mark knelt by his side now, and touched him. The body was stiff and cold. The Squire must have been dead for some hours.

"Murdered!" he said in a low voice; "my father has been murdered." He remained in horror-struck silence for a minute or two; then he slowly rose to his feet.

"Let us lay him on the bed," he said, and with the assistance of the three men he lifted and laid him there.

"He has been stabbed," he murmured, pointing to a small cut in the middle of the deep stain, just over the heart.

Ramoo, after helping to lift the Squire onto the bed, had slid down to the floor, and crouched there, sobbing convulsively. The two servants stood helpless and aghast. Mark looked round the room: the window was open. He walked to it. A garden ladder stood outside, showing how the assassin had obtained entrance. Mark stood rigid

and silent, his hands tightly clenched, his breath coming slowly and heavily. At last he roused himself.

"Leave things just as they are," he said to the men in a tone of unnatural calmness, "and fasten the door up again, and turn a table or something of that sort against it on the outside, so that no one can come in. John, do you tell one of the grooms to saddle a horse and ride down into the town. Let him tell the head constable to come up at once, and also Dr. Holloway. Then he is to go on to Sir Charles Harris, tell him what has happened, and beg him to ride over at once. Come, Ramoo," he said in a softer voice, "you can do no good here, poor fellow, and the room must be closed. It is a heavy loss to you too."

The Hindoo rose slowly, the tears streaming down his face.

"He was a good master," he said, "and I loved him just as I loved the Colonel, sahib. Ramoo would have given his life for him."

With his hand upon Ramoo's shoulder, Mark left the room; he passed a group of women huddled together with blanched faces, at a short distance down the passage, the news that the Squire's door could not be opened and the sounds made by its being broken in having called them together. Mark could not speak. He silently shook his head and passed on. As he reached his room he heard shrieks and cries behind him, as the men informed them of what had taken place. On reaching his door, the one opposite opened, and Mrs. Cunningham in a dressing-gown came out.

"What is the matter, Mark, and what are these cries about?"

"A dreadful thing has happened, Mrs. Cunningham; my father has been murdered in the night. Please tell Millicent."

Then he closed the door behind him, threw himself on his bed, and burst into a passion of tears. The Squire had been a good father to him, and had made him his friend and companion—a treatment rare indeed at a time when few sons would think of sitting down in their father's presence until told to do so. Since he had left

school, eight years before, they had been very much together. For the last two or three years Mark had been a good deal out, but in this his father had encouraged him.

"I like to see you make your own friends, Mark, and go your own way," he used to say; "it is as bad for a lad to be tied to his father's coat-tail as to his mother's apron-string. Get fresh ideas and form your own opinions. It will do for you what a public school would have done; make you self-reliant and independent."

Still, of course, a great portion of his time had been with his father, and they often would ride round the estate together and talk to the tenants, or walk in the gardens and forcing-houses. Generally Mark would be driven by his father to the meet if it took place within reasonable distance, his horse being sent on beforehand by a groom, while of an evening they would sit in the library, smoke their long pipes, and talk over politics or the American and French wars.

All this was over. There was but one thing now that he could do for his father, and that was to revenge his death, and at the thought he rose from his bed impatiently and paced up and down the room. He must wait for a week, wait till the funeral was over, and then he would be on Bastow's track. If all other plans failed he would spend his time in coaches until at last the villain should try to stop one; but there must be other ways. Could he find no other he would apply for employment as a Bow Street runner, serve for a year to find out their methods, and acquaint himself with the places where criminals were harbored. It would be the one object of his life, until he succeeded in laying his hand on Bastow's shoulder. He would not shoot him if he could help it. He should prefer to see him in the dock, to hear the sentence passed on him, and to see it carried out. As to the treasure, it was not worth a thought till his first duty was discharged.

Presently a servant brought him a cup of tea. He drank it mechanically, and then proceeded to dress himself. Sir Charles Harris would be here soon and the others; indeed, he had scarcely finished when he was told that the doctor from Reigate had just arrived, and that

the constable had come up half an hour before. He at once went down to the library, into which the doctor had been shown.

"You have heard what has happened," he said, as he shook hands silently. "I expect Sir Charles Harris here in half an hour. I suppose you will not go up till then?"

"No, I think it will be best that no none should go in until he comes. I have been speaking to Simcox; he was going in, but I told him I thought it was better to wait. I may as well take the opportunity of going upstairs to see Mr. Bastow. I hear that he fainted when he heard the news, and that he is completely prostrate."

"Two such shocks might well prove fatal to him," Mark said; "he has been weak and ailing for some time."

"Two shocks?" the doctor repeated interrogatively.

"Ah, I forgot you had not heard about the affair yesterday evening: a man fired at us through the window when we were sitting round the fire, before the candles were lit. The ball passed between my father's head and Mr. Bastow's; both had a narrow escape; the bullet is imbedded in the mantelpiece. I will have it cut out; it may be a useful item of evidence some day."

"But what could have been the man's motive? Your father was universally popular."

"Except with ill-doers," Mark said. "I ran out and chased the fellow for half a mile, and should have caught him if he had not had a horse waiting for him in a lane, and he got off by the skin of his teeth. I hope that next time I meet him he will not be so lucky. Mr. Bastow was very much shaken, and went to bed soon afterwards. I am not surprised that this second shock should be too much for him. Will you go up and see him? I will speak to Simcox."

The constable was out in the garden.

"This is a terrible business, Mr. Thorndyke. I suppose, after what you told me, you have your suspicions?"

"They are not suspicions at all—they are certainties. Did you hear that he tried to shoot my father yesterday evening?"

"No, sir, I have heard nothing about it."

Mark repeated the story of the attempt and pursuit.

"Could you swear to him, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"No, there was not much light left; besides, as I have not seen him for the last eight years, I should certainly not be able to recognize him unless I had time to have a good look at him. Had it only been last night's affair it might have been anyone; but the shooting through the window was not the act of a thief, but of an assassin, who could only have been influenced by private enmity. I quite see that at present I have no legal evidence against Bastow; I am not even in a position to prove that he is in the country, for it cannot be said that my father's belief that he recognized the voice of the man who said 'Stand and deliver!' is proof. I doubt if anyone could swear that, when he only heard three words, he was absolutely sure that it was the voice of a man he had not seen for some years. However, fortunately, that will make no difference; the man is, as I told you, wanted for his heading the mutiny in the convict prison at Sydney, which will be quite sufficient to hang him without this business. But I own that I should prefer that he were hung for my father's murder if we could secure sufficient evidence. Moreover, there is the attack upon us three or four months ago, and with the evidence of the surgeon who attended him as to his wound, that would be enough to hang him. But we have first got to catch him, and that I mean to make my business, however long the search may take me."

"Was anything taken last night, sir?"

"I don't know; I did not look. We shall see to that when we go upstairs. We may as well go indoors now; Sir Charles may be here in a few minutes, and I want to hear Dr. Holloway's report as to Mr. Bastow."

"He does not suspect, I hope, sir?"

"No, thank God; my father never mentioned to him anything he heard about his son, or his suspicions, therefore he has no reason to believe that the fellow is not still in the convict prison at Sydney. We shall keep it from him now, whatever happens; but it would, for his sake, be best that this shock should prove too much for him. He has had a very hard time of it altogether."

"He is terribly prostrate," the doctor reported when

Mark joined him. "I don't think that he will get over it. He is scarcely conscious now. You see, he is an old man, and has no reserve of strength to fall back upon. Your father has been such a good friend to him that it is not surprising the news should have been too much for him. I examined him at the Squire's request some months ago as to his heart's action, which was so weak that I told the Squire then that he might go off at any time, and I rather wonder that he recovered even temporarily from the shock."

In a few minutes Sir Charles Harris drove up.

"This is terrible news, my dear Mark," he said, as he leaped from his gig and wrung Mark's hand—"terrible. I don't know when I have had such a shock; he was a noble fellow in all respects, a warm friend, an excellent magistrate, a kind landlord, good all round. I can scarcely believe it yet. A burglar, of course. I suppose he entered the house for the purpose of robbery, when your father awoke and jumped out of bed, there was a tussle, and the scoundrel killed him; at least, that is what I gather from the story that the groom told me."

"That is near it, Sir Charles, but I firmly believe that robbery was not the object, but murder; for murder was attempted yesterday evening," and he informed the magistrate of the shot fired through the window.

"Bless me, you don't say so!" the magistrate exclaimed. "That alters the case altogether, and certainly would seem to make the act one of premeditated murder; and yet, surely, the Squire could not have had an enemy. Some of the men whom we have sentenced may have felt a grudge against him, but surely not sufficient to lead them to a crime like this."

"I will talk of it with you afterwards, Sir Charles. I have the very strongest suspicions, although no absolute proofs. Now, will you first come upstairs? Doctor Holloway is here and Simcox, but no one has entered the room since I left it; I thought it better that it should be left undisturbed until you came."

"Quite so; we will go up at once."

An examination of the room showed nothing whatever that would afford the slightest clew. The Squire's watch

was still in the watch-pocket at the head of the bed, his purse was on a small table beside him; apparently nothing had been touched in the room.

"If robbery was the object," Sir Charles said gravely, "it has evidently not been carried out, and it is probable that Mr. Thorndyke was partly woke by the opening of the window, and that he was not thoroughly aroused until the man was close to his bed; then he leapt out and seized him. Probably the stab was, as Dr. Holloway assures us, instantly fatal, and he may have fallen so heavily that the man, fearing that the house would be alarmed at the sound, at once fled, without even waiting to snatch up the purse. The whole thing is so clear that it is scarcely necessary to ask any further questions. Of course, there must be an inquest to-morrow. I should like when I go down to ask the gardener where he left the ladder yesterday. Have you examined the ground for footmarks?"

"Yes, Sir Charles, but you see it was a pretty hard frost last night, and I cannot find any marks at all. The ground must have been like iron about the time when the ladder was placed there."

The gardener, on being called in, said that the ladder was always hung up outside the shed at the back of the house; there was a chain round it, and he had found that morning that one the links had been filed through.

"The Squire was most particular about its being locked, as Mr. Mark knows, so that it could not be used by any ill-disposed chaps who might come along at night. The key of the padlock was always hung on a nail round the other side of the shed. The Squire knew of it, and so did Mr. Mark and me; so that while it was out of the way of the eyes of a thief, any of us could run and get it and undo the padlock in a minute in case of fire or anything of that sort. I have not used the ladder, maybe, for a fortnight, but I know that it was hanging in its place yesterday afternoon."

"I expect the fellow was prowling about here for some time," Mark said. "I was chatting with my father in the library when I thought I heard a noise, and I threw open the window, which had by some carelessness been

left a little open, and went out, and listened for nearly an hour, but I could hear nothing, and put it down to the fact that I was nervous owing to what had happened early in the evening, and that the noise was simply fancy, or that the frost had caused a dry branch of one of the shrubs to crack."

"How was it you did not notice the window was open as you went in?"

"The curtains were drawn, sir. I glanced at that when I went into the room with my father. After being shot at once from outside, it was possible that we might be again; though I own that I did not for a moment think that the fellow would return after the hot chase that I gave him. I suppose after I went in he looked about and found the ladder; it is likely enough that he would have had a file with him in case he had any bars to cut through to get into the house, but to my mind it is more likely that he knew where to find the ladder without any looking for it; it has hung there as long as I can remember."

"Yes, sir," the gardener said, "I have worked for the Squire ever since he came here, and the ladder was bought a week or two after he took me on, and the Squire settled where it should be hung, so that it might be handy either in case of fire or if wanted for a painting job. This aint the first ladder; we got a new one four years ago."

"It is singular that the man should have known which was the window of your father's room."

"Very singular," Mark said.

Shortly after the doctor left, and Mark had a long talk with the magistrate in the library, and told him his reasons for suspecting that the murderer was Arthur Bastow.

"It certainly looks like it," the magistrate said thoughtfully, after he had heard Mark's story, "though of course it is only a case of strong suspicion, and not of legal proof. Your father's recognition of the voice could have scarcely been accepted as final when he heard but three words, still the whole thing hangs together. The fellow was, I should say, capable of anything. I

don't know that I ever had a prisoner before me whose demeanor was so offensive and insolent, and if it can be proved that Bastow is in England I should certainly accept your view of the case. He would probably have known both where the ladder was to be found and which was the window of your father's bedroom."

"I should certainly think that he would know it, sir. The bedroom was the same that my grandfather used to sleep in, and probably during the years before we came here young Bastow would have often been over the house. The first year or two after we came he was often up here with his father, but I know that my father took such an objection to him, his manner and language were so offensive, that he would not have me, boy as I was—I was only about eleven when he came here—associate with him in the smallest degree. But during those two years he may very well have noticed where the ladder was."

"Do you intend to say anything about all this to-morrow at the inquest, Mark?"

"I don't think I shall do so," Mark said moodily. "I am certain of it myself, but I don't think any man would convict him without stronger evidence than I could give. However, that business in Australia will be sufficient to hang him."

"I think you are right, Mark. Of course, if you do light upon any evidence, we can bring this matter up in another court; if not, there will be no occasion for you to appear in it at all, but leave it altogether for the authorities to prove the Sydney case against him; it will only be necessary for the constables who got up the other case against him to prove his sentence, and for the reports of the Governor of the jail to be read. There will be no getting over that, and he will be hung as a matter of course. It will be a terrible thing for his unhappy father."

"I do not think that he is likely to come to know it, sir; the shock of the affair yesterday and that of this morning have completely prostrated him, and Dr. Holloway, who was up with him before you arrived, thinks that there is very little chance of his recovery."

When the magistrate had left, Mark sent a request to Mrs. Cunningham that she would come down for a few minutes. She joined him in the drawing room.

"Thank you for coming down," he said quietly. "I wanted to ask how you were, and how Millicent is."

"She is terribly upset. You see, the Squire was the only father she had ever known; and had he been really so he could not have been kinder. It is a grievous loss to me also, after ten years of happiness here; but I have had but little time to think of my own loss yet, I have been too occupied in soothing the poor girl. How are you feeling yourself, Mark?"

"I don't understand myself," he said. "I don't think that anyone could have loved his father better than I have done; but since I broke down when I first went to my room I seem to have no inclination to give way to sorrow. I feel frozen up; my voice does not sound to me as if it were my own; I am able to discuss matters as calmly as if I were speaking of a stranger. The one thing that I feel passionately anxious about is to set out on the track of the assassin."

"There is nothing unusual in your state of feeling, Mark. Such a thing as this is like a wound in battle; the shock is so great that for a time it numbs all pain. I have heard my husband say that a soldier who has had his arm carried off by a cannon ball will fall from the shock, and when he recovers consciousness will be ignorant where he has been hit. It is so with you; probably the sense of pain and loss will increase every day as you take it in more and more. As for what you say about the murderer, it will undoubtedly be a good thing for you to have something to employ your thoughts and engage all your faculties as soon as this is all over. Is there anything that I can do?"

"No, thank you; the inquest will be held to-morrow. I have sent down to Chatterton to come up this afternoon to make the necessary preparations for the funeral. Let me see, to-day is Wednesday, is it not? I seem to have lost all account of the time."

"Yes, Wednesday."

"Then I suppose the funeral will be on Monday or

Tuesday. If there is any message that you want sent down to the town, one of the grooms will carry it whenever you wish."

"Thank you; 'tis not worth sending particularly, any time will do, but I shall want to send a note to Mrs. Wilson presently, asking her to come up the first thing tomorrow morning."

"He can take it whenever you like, Mrs. Cunningham. I have nothing to send down for, as far as I know. I suppose you have heard that the doctor thinks very badly of Mr. Bastow?"

"Yes. Ramoo is sitting with him now."

"Then I think, if you will write your note at once, Mrs. Cunningham, I will send one down to Dr. Holloway, asking him to send an experienced nurse. He said he should call again this afternoon, but the sooner a nurse comes the better."

That afternoon Mark wrote a letter to the family solicitors, telling them of what had taken place, and stating that the funeral would be on the following Tuesday, and asking them to send down a clerk with his father's will, or if one of the partners could manage to come down, he should greatly prefer it, in view of the explanations that would be necessary. He had already sent off a letter to the head of the Detective Department, asking him to send down one of his best men as soon as possible. Then he went out into the garden, and walked backwards and forwards for about two hours, and then returned to what he thought would be a solitary meal. Mrs. Cunningham, however, came down. She had thoughtfully had the large dining-table pushed on one side, and a small one placed near the fire.

"I thought it would be more comfortable," she said, "as there are only our two selves, just to sit here."

He thanked her with a look. It was a nice little dinner, and Mark, to his surprise, ate it with an appetite. Except the cup of tea that he had taken in the morning, and a glass of wine at midday, he had touched nothing. Mrs. Cunningham was a woman of great tact, and by making him talk of the steps that he intended to take to hunt down the assassin, kept him from thinking.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Cunningham," he said, when the dinner was over. "I feel very much better."

"I have brought down my work," she said, "and will sit here while you drink your wine and smoke a pipe. Millicent has gone to bed, completely worn out, and it will be pleasanter for us both to sit here than to be alone."

Mark gladly agreed to the proposal. She turned the conversation now to India, and talked of her life there.

"I was not out there very long," she said. "I was engaged to my husband when he first went out, and six years afterwards joined him there, and we were married. Your uncle, who was a major of his regiment, gave me away. My husband got his company six months afterwards, and was killed three years later. My pension as his widow was not a large one, and when your uncle offered me the charge of his daughter I was very glad to accept it. He gave some idea of his plans for her. I thought they were very foolish, but when I saw that his mind was thoroughly made up I did not attempt to dissuade him. He said that when he came home to England (and he had no idea when that would be) he should have me here, as head of his establishment, and it would be given out that the child was his ward. I hoped that he would alter his mind later on, but, as you know, he never did."

"Well, of course, she will have to be told now," Mark said.

"Do you think so? It seems to me that it were better that she would go as she is, at any rate, until she is twenty-one."

"That would be quite impossible," Mark said decidedly. "How could I assume the position of master here? And even if I could, it would be a strange thing indeed for me to be here with a girl the age of my cousin, even with you as chaperon. You must see yourself that it would be quite impossible."

"But how could she live here by herself?"

"I don't think she could live here by herself," Mark said, "especially after what has happened. Of course, it has all got to be talked over, but my idea is that the place

had better be shut up, and that you should take, in your own name, a house in London. I suppose she will want masters for the harp, and so on. For a time, at any rate, that would be the best plan, unless you would prefer some other place to London. We have done our best to carry out my uncle's wishes, but circumstances have been too strong for us, and it cannot be kept up any longer; but there is no reason, if you and she prefer it, why she should not be known, until you return here, by her present name. Of course the affair will create a great deal of talk down here, but in London no one will know that Millicent is an heiress, though it is hardly likely that you will make many acquaintances for a time."

"Have you known it long, Mark? I thought that you were kept in ignorance of it."

"I only heard it yesterday evening, Mrs. Cunningham; after that shot through the window my father thought I ought to know all about it, for the attempt might be repeated more successfully. He told me all about her, and about the treasure."

"What treasure?" Mrs. Cunningham said. "I don't know what you mean."

He then told her of the story his uncle had related, and how he had been prevented from giving full instructions for its discovery, the only clew being a gold coin and the word Masulipatam, and that this treasure had been left equally divided between him and Millicent by his will.

"He told me that he should provide for you," Mrs. Cunningham remarked, "when I said that it would be unfair that you should be brought up believing yourself the heir. I never heard any more about it, but I am glad that it is so."

"I fancy the chance of its coming to either of us is very small," Mark said; "a coin and a word are not much to go upon. I have not the most remote idea what they mean, and whether the treasure is in England or in India. Heaven only knows."

"Possibly, when he made the will, he may have told the solicitors where it was, and instructed them to keep it secret until the time that Millicent came into possession of the estate."

"It is just possible he did so, Mrs. Cunningham, but the efforts he made to speak at the last moment would almost seem to show that he had not told them, for, if he had, the matter would have been of no vital importance one way or the other. Will Millicent be well enough to come down in the morning?"

"I hope so."

"I hope so, too; but, at any rate, keep her up in her room till the afternoon. The inquest will be at eleven o'clock, and it is better that she should not come down until everyone has gone away."