

CHAPTER XX.

At ten o'clock a constable came with a message from the Lieutenant to Mr. Chetwynd that he would be glad if he would come down to the watch-house. Dick did not wake the others, but freshening himself up by pouring a jug of water over his head, went at once with the constable.

"Have you news?" he asked eagerly as he entered.

"Yes, the men returned an hour ago. At four of the houses they went to a foreign sailor had been lodging there for the last day or so, but yesterday afternoon all had paid their reckoning and left. Then the idea struck me that it would be as well to ask if they had been seen on the quays, and I sent off a fresh batch of men to make inquiries. A quarter of an hour ago one of them came back with the news that he had learned from a sailor that he had noticed a dark-colored foreigner, whom he took to be a Lascar sailor, talking to a boatman, and that they had rowed off together to a barge anchored a short way out; he did not notice anything more about him.

"Now, I should not be at all surprised if the fellow went off to arrange with the bargeman for a passage for himself and four or five comrades to some port or other, it might be anywhere. It would make no difference to them where the barge was bound for. No doubt he saw the man again after the brig was sighted, and told him that they should come on board soon after it got dark, and told him to have the boat at the stairs. You see, in that case they might not have carried Mr. Thorndyke above fifty yards. They would probably get him on board as one of their party who had been drunk. The barge, no doubt, got under way about nine o'clock, which is the hour when the tide was high last night, and during the night the Indians could easily drop your friend overboard—and may even have done so before they got under

way, which would have been the easiest thing to do. There would have been no one at the helm, and they could have chosen a moment when the crew, probably only three, were below. I am afraid that this is not a cheering lookout, but I have little doubt that it is the correct one.

"I have told my men to find out what barge was lying at the spot the sailor pointed out, and if we discover her name, which we are likely to be able to do, there will be no difficulty in finding out to whom she belongs and where she was bound for. Then we can follow it up; though there is little likelihood of our finding the murderers still on board."

"Thank you very much for the pains that you are taking, sir," Dick said. "I am afraid that there is no shadow of hope of finding my poor friend alive. I have no doubt that the thing has happened exactly as you suggest; the whole course of the affair shows how carefully it was planned, and I have no hope that any scruple about taking life would be felt by them for a moment. I will go back to the hotel, and I shall be obliged if you will let me know as soon as you obtain any clew as to the barge."

An hour and a half later the officer himself came round to the room where Dick Chetwynd and the two pugilists were sitting. The detectives had started out to make inquiries on their own account, taking with them a hanger-on at the hotel who spoke English.

"The barge's name was the *Julié*," he said; "she has a cargo on board for Rotterdam."

"I think the best thing would be to take a carriage, and drive there at once," Dick said.

"You can do that, sir, but I don't think you will be there before the barge; they have something like eighteen hours' start for you, and the wind has been all the time in the east. I should say that they would be there by eight o'clock this morning."

"No, I don't know that it would be of any use, but at least it would be doing something. I suppose we could be there in four hours?"

"From that to five; but even if the barge were delayed,

and you got there first, which is very unlikely, I do not think that there would be the remotest chance of finding those villains on board. I reckon they would, as we agreed, launch the body overboard even before they got under way here, and they may either have landed again before the craft got under way, pretending that they had changed their minds, and then walked across to The Hague or to Haarlem, or have gone on with the barge for two hours, or even until daybreak. If by that time they were near Rotterdam, they may have stayed on board till they got there; if not, they may have landed, and finished the journey on foot, but they would certainly not have stopped on board after six or seven o'clock this morning. They would calculate that possibly we might get on their track at an early hour this morning, and set out in pursuit at once.

"However, it will doubtless be a satisfaction to you to be moving, and at least you will be able to overhaul the barge when you get to Rotterdam, and to hear what the boatmen say. The chances are they will not even have noticed that one of the men who came on board was missing. The men may very well have made up a long bundle, carried it on shore with them, or three of them may have carried a fourth ashore; and in the dark the bargemen were unlikely to have noticed that the number was less than when they came on board. However, it will be something for you to find out when and where the fellows landed."

"Yes; I should certainly like to lay hands on them, though I am afraid we should find it very hard to prove that they had anything to do with this affair."

"I think that also, Mr. Chetwynd. Morally, we may feel absolutely certain; but, unless the boatmen noticed that one of their number was missing when they landed, we have at present no evidence to connect them with it."

"We will set out as soon as my other two men return. I told them to be back soon after twelve. I will write to you this evening from Rotterdam. Ah! here are the men."

The door opened, and, to the stupefaction of the party, Mark Thorndyke entered the room.

"Good Heavens, Mark!" Dick exclaimed, springing forward and seizing his hand, "is it really you alive in the flesh? We had given you up for dead. We have been searching the town for you all night, and were just going to set out for Rotterdam in search of a barge on which we believed you were carried. Why, it seems almost a miracle!"

The two prizefighters also came forward, and shook hands with a pressure that would have made most men shrink.

"I am as glad, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said, "as if anyone had given me a thousand pounds. I have never quite given up hope, for, as I said to Mr. Chetwynd, if you got but a shadow of a chance, you would polish off those nigger fellows in no time; but I was afraid that they never would give you a chance. Well, I am glad, sir."

"Mark, this is the Lieutenant of the watch here," Dick said. "He has been most kind, and has himself headed the search that has been made for you all night. Now tell us all about it."

"First of all give me something to drink, for, except some water, I have had nothing since dinner yesterday. You are right, Dick; it is almost a miracle, even to me, that I am here. I would not have given a penny for my chance of life, and I can no more account for the fact that I am here than you can."

Mark drank off a tumbler of weak spirits and water that Gibbons poured out for him. Chetwynd rang the bell, and ordered lunch to be brought up at once. Just at this moment the two detectives came in, and were astonished and delighted at finding Mark there.

"Now," he said, "I will tell you as much as I know, which is little enough. When I came to my senses I found myself lying on the deck of a craft of some sort; it was a long time before I could at all understand how I got there, I think it was the pain from the back of my head that brought it to my mind that I must have been knocked down and stunned in that fight; for some time I was very vague in my brain as to that, but it all came back suddenly, and I recalled that we had all got

separated. I was hitting out, and then there was a crash. Yes, I must have been knocked down and stunned, and I could only suppose that in the darkness and confusion I had been carried off and taken on board without any of you missing me; my hands and feet were tied, and there was something shoved into my mouth that prevented me from speaking.

"I should think that it must have been an hour before I quite recovered my senses, and got the thing fairly into my mind. Then a man with a knife leant over me, and made signs that if I spoke he would stab me, and another took the gag out of my mouth and poured some water down my throat, and then put it in again. I saw that he was a dark-colored man, and I then understood it all; it was those Hindoos who had got up the attack upon us and had carried me off. I had no doubt they had got the diamonds I had sewn up in the waistband of my trousers.

"I wondered why they were keeping me, but was sure they would stab me presently and throw me overboard. I knew that they had killed two soldiers for the sake of the diamonds, and if it hadn't been that they had given me the water, I should not have had a shadow of doubt about my fate."

"I puzzled over why they should have done so, and came to the conclusion that they dared not do it on board, because of the crew, and that they intended to take me on shore somewhere, and there dispose of me. I made many attempts to loosen my ropes, but they would not give the slightest. At last I think I dozed off for a time. After I had had the water they drew a blanket or something of that sort over me. It had been there before, but it had only been pulled up as high as my nose, and I felt sure that it was only done to prevent the Dutchmen on the boat seeing that I was bound and gagged; this time they pulled it right over my face. When they took it off again I could see it was nearly morning, for there was a faint light in the sky. They were moving about on the deck, and presently I saw one of the sailors get into the boat and pull it along, hand over hand, by the rail, until he was close to me. Then

four Lascar sort of chaps—I could scarcely make out their features—lifted me and lowered me into the boat and got in themselves.

"I did not attempt to struggle. No doubt they had made up some tale that I was mad or something of that sort, and I thought that I had best pretend to be quiet and peaceable till I could see some sort of chance of making a fight for it. It was but a few yards from the shore. The man lifted me out onto the bank, and the sailor then started to row back to the barge; they carried me a few yards away, and then laid me face downwards on some grass. Now, I thought to myself, it is all over; they are going to stab me and make off. To my surprise I felt they were doing something—I could not make out what—to the ropes; then there was quiet. I lay there. I should think for half an hour, wondering why on earth they did not finish me. At last I made up my mind to move, and turned round onto my back. As I lay there I could see no one, and, raising my head, looked round. To my amazement I found that I was alone. It was now almost light, and as I craned my head in all directions I assured myself that they had gone; then I began to try again at the ropes.

"To my surprise I found that they were much looser than they were before, although still tight enough to give me nearly an hour's work before I got my hands free. Then it took me almost as long to get the ropes off my legs, for they had knotted them in such a fearfully intricate way that it was a long time before I could even discover where the ends were. At last I finished the job, stood up, and looked round. A quarter of a mile off there was a good-sized town, but not a soul could I see.

"Till now I had hardly thought of the diamonds; I put my hands to my waistband and found, as I expected, that they were gone. I think I felt nothing but pleasure: the confounded things had given trouble enough, and I was well rid of them. Why they should have spared my life I could not imagine. If they had finished me, which they could have done without any risk to themselves when they got me ashore, they could have gone off with

the diamonds without the slightest fear of pursuit, while now there was, of course, a chance that I might follow and recognize them."

"Would you know them again?" the Lieutenant interrupted.

"Not in the slightest; it was light enough to see that they were dark, but from the time the boat came along the blanket was over my head, and except when they gave me the water I had no chance of seeing any of their features. Still, if I had gone straight to the town I saw and reported the matter to the authorities and sent mounted men to all the ports to warn them not to let any colored men embark, I might have given them a lot of trouble, but I don't suppose any of them would ever have been caught. After the craft they had shown in the whole matter, it is certain that they would have laid their plans for escape so well that the law would never have laid hands upon them. I put my hand mechanically to my watch to see the time, and to my astonishment discovered that I still had it in my pocket, and was equally surprised to find that the money in my trousers' pockets was also untouched. The watch had, of course, stopped. I first of all went down to the water and had a good wash; then I proceeded to the town, and, going to a hotel, ordered breakfast."

"Why, I thought you said that you had had nothing to eat, Mark."

"Yes? Well, I had forgotten all about that breakfast. The people looked a good deal surprised at an Englishman walking in in that way. While I was eating my breakfast two men—who were, I suppose, authorities of some kind—who spoke English, came and questioned me. As I had made up my mind to say nothing more about the affair, I merely told them that I had come for a sail from Amsterdam, and that I wanted a carriage to take me back. They were evidently astonished at my choosing a dark night for such a trip, but I said that I had some curiosity to see how the boatmen navigated their vessel when there were no lighthouses or anything to steer by. They asked a few more questions, and then went away, evidently thinking that I was a little mad. However,

they must have spoken to the landlord, who in a short time made signs that the carriage was at the door.

"I had avoided asking the men either the name of the place or how far it was from any big town, because that would have made the whole affair more singular. It was a quarter-past eight when I started, and beyond the fact that I know by the sun we came pretty nearly due east, I have not the slightest idea of the road. The coachman could not speak a word of English. I should say we came about seven miles an hour, and stopped once to bait the horses, so I suppose that I must have been between four and five miles from Rotterdam when I landed."

Lunch had by this time been laid on the table, and at Dick's invitation the Lieutenant joined them.

"It is an extraordinary story!" he said. "That your life should have been spared is altogether beyond my comprehension, still more so why they should have left you your money and watch."

"The whole story is extraordinary," Dick Chetwynd said; "for we have every reason to believe that those fellows, or at least one or two of them, have been patiently watching for a chance of carrying off those diamonds for twenty years. When my friend told me of it ten days ago I did not believe that it could be possible; but he has certainly shown that he was correct in his opinion."

Mark then related the history of the jewels, surprising the pugilists and detectives as much as the Lieutenant.

"It is extraordinary indeed," the latter said. "I should not have believed it possible that men would devote so many years to such a purpose, nor that they could have succeeded in tracing the diamonds in spite of the precaution taken by your uncle, and afterwards by yourself. It would seem that from the time he landed in England he, and after him your father and yourself, must have been watched almost night and day. I can understand now why they did not take your watch and money. They evidently acted from a sort of religious enthusiasm, and were no ordinary thieves, but as evidently they did not hesitate to kill, I cannot understand why they should have added to their risks by sparing you."

"No, that is what puzzles me," Mark agreed. "I was

thinking it over while we were driving here. Now let me hear about the fight, Dick. How did you all come out of it?"

"As well as could be expected. Gibbons and Tring both got some heavy blows with the cudgels, as indeed we all did more or less, but they did great execution. Eleven fellows were left senseless on the ground, and one of them, that black fellow who came over with us, was killed. The other ten are all in prison. All of us did our best, and managed to leave our mark on eight others, who were in consequence picked out, and are also in jail."

Dick went on to relate the particulars of the search.

"You see, our friend here had traced you to the barge and found out her destination, and if you had come ten minutes later you would have found that we had all just started for Rotterdam. I was only waiting for Chester and Malcolm to return to set out. I am sorry, Mark, that you have lost your diamonds; not so much because they are gone, for I can well understand you to be thoroughly glad to be rid of such dangerous articles, but because they have carried them off in our teeth, after we have been specially retained to protect you. I certainly thought that with such a bodyguard you were absolutely safe from any number of Hindoos."

"Yes, we made a regular mess of it, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said. "I never felt so certain of winning a battle as I did that you would not be touched as long as we were looking after you. Tring and I, if we had been asked, would have said that we could each have taken on a dozen foreigners easily. Mr. Chetwynd is handy with his fists too, though he hasn't your weight and reach, and your two other friends are both pretty well accustomed to deal with rough customers. As for Tring and me, it makes one feel small to know that we have been bested by a handful of niggers, or Hindoos, or whatever the chaps are, whom a good-sized boy of twelve ought to be able to polish off."

"Now, Mark, what is to be done next?" Dick Chetwynd asked.

"The next thing will be to get back as soon as we can,

Dick. I, for one, have had enough of Holland to last me for a lifetime."

"I am afraid, gentlemen," the Lieutenant said, "you will have to wait a day or two before you can leave. I have nineteen men in prison, and there will be a meeting of magistrates this afternoon. Now you have come back, Mr. Thorndyke, the charge against them won't be as serious as it would have been before, but they are guilty of a desperate and premeditated assault upon six passengers on their arrival here; they have already admitted that they were paid for their work; and as among them are some of the worst characters in the city, you may be sure that now we have got them fairly in our hands we shall not let them go. It is so simple an affair that the investigation ought not to take long, but we shall want to find out, if we can, who acted as the intermediary between the Hindoos and the prisoners. I should think that two meetings ought to be sufficient for the present, but I am afraid that there may then be a long remand, and that you will either have to remain here or to come over again."

"It would be a horrible nuisance," Dick said; "still it would be better to come back again than to wait here indefinitely, and anyhow I don't suppose it would be necessary for all of us to come back again."

"I should not mind if it could be arranged for me to be here again in a month's time," Mark agreed, "for, to tell you the truth, I am going to be married in less than three weeks, and as I had intended to come to Brussels, and afterwards to travel for a while, I could make a visit here without greatly putting myself out."

"I will try and arrange that, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I shall be glad," Mark said, "if you can manage to get the men sentenced without going into the question of the diamonds at all, and treat the matter as a mere attempt at robbery. It surely would not be necessary to bring the question of my being carried away into the matter at all; I can give evidence that I was knocked down and stunned, and that I was robbed of some jewels that I had about me, which were the object of the attack."

"I think we should have to admit that," the Lieu-

tenant said; "it must come out that the attack was an organized one."

"Well, if it must, it must," Mark said reluctantly; "but then, you see, no end of questions would be asked, and the thing might be delayed while a search is being made for the men who stole the bracelet."

"Well, we will keep it out of the inquiry if we can," the Lieutenant said. "The meeting will be at three o'clock. I will send a man to take you to the Town Hall."

At the appointed hour the party proceeded to the court, and the eighteen prisoners, under a strong guard, having been brought in, six magistrates took their places on the bench; the rest of the court was crowded, the fray on the wharf and the number of captures having created quite a stir in the city. They had arranged that Tring should first give his evidence, which he did, the Lieutenant of the watch acting as interpreter, though most of the magistrates understood English. The appearance of the prisoners created quite a sensation in the court, for the injuries that they had received were now even more conspicuous than they had been when they were first captured; some of them had to be led into court, their eyes being completely closed, others had their heads bandaged, and all showed signs of tremendous punishment. Tring related that he, with five others, had come ashore together; one of his companions had a row on board a ship they had crossed in, with a Lascar sailor, who was a passenger, and they kept together as they were crossing the wharf, thinking that possibly the man might attempt to stab his companion.

"I was walking behind him," Tring went on, "when the Lascar jumped suddenly out from among the men standing about, and was about to stab my companion, when I hit him just in time, and he went down; then there was a rush, and we all got separated, and did as well as we could until the watch came up; that is all that I know about it."

"Is the Lascar among the prisoners?" one of the magistrates asked the Lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir, when picked up by one of my men he was

found to be dead; the blow had apparently killed him instantly."

The other five then gave their evidence; it was similar to that of Tring, save that being in front of him they knew nothing of the attack by the Lascar. All they knew about it was that there was a sudden rush upon them by a number of men armed with bludgeons, that they were separated, and that each defended himself until the guard came up.

Some of the watch then gave evidence, and told how on arriving at the spot eleven of the prisoners were found lying senseless; how, on recovering, they were all taken to the watch-house, where several of them were recognized as notoriously bad characters; they had admitted that they were paid to make the attack, which was apparently the result of the private enmity of some person or persons unknown to one or more of those attacked.

The Lieutenant then related the steps that he had taken to capture others connected with the attack, and that he found eight men bearing marks of the fray, and that all these were also notorious characters, and associates of the prisoners first taken. The first witnesses were again questioned; five of them said that, so far as they knew, they had no personal enemies. Mark, who was the last to get into the witness-box, said that he himself had no enemies, but that an uncle of his, who was in the British Indian service, had a sort of feud with some members of a sect there on account of some jewels that he had purchased, and which had, they declared, been stolen from a temple. Two soldiers through whose hands these things had passed, had been successively killed by them, and his uncle had to the day of his death believed that their vengeance would one day fall upon him.

"I can only suppose," continued Mark, "that I have inherited the enmity they bore him, as I inherited the jewels, and that the attack was really designed solely against me, and the consequences might have been fatal to me had it not been for the strength and courage of my fellow passengers."

"Did they come with you for your protection, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"To some extent, yes. The fact is, that I have for some time been convinced that I was followed about by natives of India, and remembering what my uncle had said on the subject, I became to some degree apprehensive, and thought it as well to leave London for a short time. That this attack was really instigated by the men I have no doubt whatever, since, as you have heard, it was begun by a Lascar, who tried to stab one of my companions and who received a knockdown blow that caused his death from one of the others. It is a well-known fact that these people will cherish for many years a determination to avenge any injury. However, I hope that after the failure of this attempt upon my life I shall hear no more of them."

"Were any knives found on the prisoners?" the magistrates asked the Lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir; all carried clubs. And they told me that they had been especially ordered not to take knives, and had indeed been searched before they came out."

"What impression do you gather from that, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"My impression is, sir, that they desired to overpower those with me and to beat them down, in order to carry out their revenge upon me."

After some consultation the magistrate who had before spoken said:

"The prisoners will be remanded. It is necessary that we should find out who was the chief culprit who bribed this gang."

As soon as the prisoners were taken out of court Mark slipped across to the magistrates, accompanied by the Lieutenant as interpreter.

"I hope, gentlemen, that our presence here will not be necessary, for it would be a matter of extreme inconvenience. I may say that my marriage is fixed for to-day three weeks, hence you can well imagine that I want to return as soon as possible. Two of the men are, as you have heard, Bow Street officers, whose presence could not well be spared."

The magistrates again consulted together.

"Your evidence has all been taken down by the clerk

of the court. Certainly we should not require your presence at the remand; but whether we should do so at the trial would, of course, depend upon whether these men all own their guilt, which, having been taken red-handed, it is likely enough they will do. We will consent, therefore, to your leaving, if you will give us an undertaking to return for the trial if your presence is necessary, and that you will bring with you the man who struck down the Lascar who commenced the fray, and one of the others."

"That I will do willingly," Mark replied. "We are much obliged to you for your consideration. I shall be traveling for a time after my marriage; but I will as I pass through Belgium after my marriage give you the route I intend to take and the address at which letters will find me, and if you send me a sufficiently long notice I will at once return for the trial."