CHAPTER XXI.

"You managed that very well, Mark," Dick said. "You kept well within the limits of truth without bringing the real facts of the attack upon us into the case."

"Well, you see, Dick, after working as a detective, one gets into the way of telling stories with the smallest amount of deviation possible from the truth. What will these fellows get done to them, Lieutenant?"

"I should say that they will get two or three years' imprisonment; the only charge now is rioting and assault. It is lucky for them that they had clubs instead of knives, for that would have brought the matter under the head of attempted murder. The matter of the gems was not important in the case, but there is sure to be a great fuss and search for the missing Indians. I suppose you will soon be off home now?"

"Yes, I shall find out to-night what vessel leaves for England to-morrow, and take a berth in the first that sails for London. It is too late to think of starting this evening, and indeed I feel that I want a long night's rest, for I did not sleep much last night, and have not quite recovered from that crack on my head."

On his return to the hotel Mark sent out a man to inquire at the shipping offices, and finding that a bark would sail at nine o'clock the next morning, they went down and took berths, and sailed in her next day. The voyage home was a rapid one, for the wind blew steadily from the east, and the vessel made the passage to the mouth of the river in two days, and the next took them up to London.

"I will call round to-morrow or next day, Gibbons, with the checks for you both," Mark said as he prepared to go ashore.

"No, sir. We are both of one mind that we could not take them. We went over to prevent you being

robbed of those sparklers, and to see that you came to no harm. Well, the things are lost, and you got knocked down and carried away. It is no thanks to us that you are alive now. It is a mortifying job, that with two detectives to watch over things and with us to fight we should have been fairly beat by a few black niggers."

"If there had been any bungling on your part, Gibbons, there might be something in what you say, but no one could have foreseen that before we had been on shore two minutes we should have been attacked in that way. You both did all that men could do, as was shown by the condition of the fellows who were taken. I was just as much separated from you as you were from me, and the fact that we were surprised as we were is really due to my not determining to stay on board until the morning, which I could no doubt have done with the captain's permission. It never struck me for a moment that we should be attacked in force. I thought it probable that an attempt at assassination would be made, but it certainly did not seem probable that it would be attempted while you were all with me. You are not in the slightest degree to blame, for your part of the agreement was carried out to my satisfaction. I shall certainly carry out mine, as I have arrived home safe and sound."

"Well, governor, it is very good of you; but I tell you it will go against the grain for us to take your money."

On landing, Mark parted with Dick Chetwynd, who had arranged to drop Mark's bag at his lodgings on his way home, and at once took a hackney coach to Islington. Millicent gave a cry of delight as he entered the room.

"You are back earlier than I expected, Mark. You told me before you started that the wind was in the east, and that you might be a long time getting to Amsterdam unless it changed. I have been watching the vane on the church, and it has been pointing east ever since. Well, you have sold the diamonds, I hope?" she said, after the first greeting was over.

"No; I have bad news for you, Millicent; the jewels have been stolen."

"Well it does not make much difference, Mark. We

have much more than enough without them, so don't bother yourself in the least. How did it happen?"

"Well, it is rather a long story. I will tell it you when Mrs. Cunningham is here, so as not to have to go over it twice. How are the dresses getting on?"

"I suppose they are getting on all right," she said. "I have done nothing for the last two days but try them on. You see, we put them out to three milliners, and they all three seem to reach the same point together, and I start after breakfast, and it takes about two hours at each place. You don't know what trouble you have given me by hurrying things on so unreasonably."

"Well, it is better to have it all done and over," he said, "than to have the thing hanging over you for a couple of months."

"That is what Mrs. Cunningham says. Now I want to hear about your adventures, and I will call her down. Only think, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said presently, with a laugh, after she had returned with her, "this silly boy has actually let the diamonds be stolen from him."

"No, really, Millicent!"

"Yes, indeed. Fancy his not being fit to be trusted to look after them! However, I tell him it is of no consequence. I don't know how they went. He would not tell me the story until you came down."

"I am sorry to say it is true, Mrs. Cunningham, although I can assure you that I really cannot blame myself for either carelessness or stupidity. I knew when I started that there was a very great risk, and took what seemed to me every possible precaution, for in addition to Dick Chetwynd going with me, I took two detectives from Bow Street and two prizefighters."

Exclamations of surprise broke from both ladies.

"And yet, in spite of all that, these things were stolen," Millicent said. "How on earth did they do it? I should have sewn them up in my pockets inside my dress."

"I sewed them up in the waistband of my trousers, Millicent, and yet they managed, in spite of us, to steal them. And now I must begin by telling you the whole

history of those diamonds, and you will understand why I thought it necessary to take a strong party with me."

He then told them, repeating the history the Colonel had given his father of the diamonds, and the conviction that he had, that he had been followed by Hindoos, and the instructions he had given for the disposal of the bracelet.

"As you know," he said, "nothing happened to confirm my uncle's belief that there were men over here in search of the diamonds during my father's life, but since then I have come to the same conclusion that he had, and felt positive that I was being constantly followed wherever I went. As soon as I heard where the treasure was I began to take every precaution in my power. I avoided going to the bank after my first visit there, and, as you know, would not bring the things for you to look at. I got Dick Chetwynd to go there, open the case, and take out these diamonds. He did not bring them away with him, but fetched them from there the morning we started. He went down and took the passage for us both at the shipping office, and the pugilists and the detectives each took passages for themselves, so that I hoped, however closely I was followed, they would not learn that I was taking them to Amsterdam."

"It was very wrong, Mark; very wrong indeed," Millicent broke in. "You had no right to run such a terrible risk; it would have been better for you to have taken the diamonds and thrown them into the Thames."

"That would not have improved matters," he said; "the Indians would not have known that I had got rid of them, and would have continued their efforts to find them, and I should always have been in danger instead of getting it over once for all. However, I did not think that there was any danger, going over as I did, with two of the best prizefighters in England, to say nothing of the detectives, who were the men who were with me when I caught Bastow. The only danger was that I might be stabbed; but, as they would know, it was no use their stabbing me unless they could search me quietly, and that they could not do unless I was alone and in some lonely neighborhood; and I had made up my mind

not to stir out unless the whole party were with me. I found out when we got on board that, in spite of all the precautions I had taken, they had discovered that I was going to sail for Amsterdam, which they could only have done by following Dick as well as myself. There was a dark-faced foreign sailor, who, I had no doubt, was a Hindoo, already on board, and I saw another in a boat watching us start; this was unpleasant, but as I felt sure that they could not have known that I had with me detectives and pugilists, I still felt that they would be able to do nothing when I got to Amsterdam."

Then he told them the whole story of the attack, of his being carried away, and of his unexpected release; of the search that had been made for him, and the arrest of eighteen of his assailants.

Millicent grew pale as he continued, and burst into tears when she heard of his being a prisoner in the hands of the Hindoos.

"I shall never let you go out of my sight again, Mark!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "It was bad enough before when you were searching for that man here, and I used to be terribly anxious; but that was nothing to this."

"Well, there is an end of it now, Millicent; the men have got the diamonds, and will soon be on their way to India, if they have not started already."

"Nasty things!" she said; "I shall never like diamonds again: they will always remind me of the terrible danger that you have run. Isn't it extraordinary that for twenty years four or five men should be spending their lives waiting for a chance of getting them back!"

"I do not expect there were so many as that; probably there was only one. He would have no difficulty in learning that my father had not received any extraordinary gems from my uncle, and probably supposed that they would not be taken out from wherever they might be until you came of age. After the death of my father he might suppose that I should take them out, or that, at any rate, I should go to whoever had them, and see that they were all right, and he then, perhaps, engaged half a dozen Lascars—there are plenty of them at the

docks—and had me watched wherever I went; and, do you know, that I believe I once owed my life to them."

"How was that, Mark?"

"Well, I was captured by some fellows who suspected me to be a Bow Street runner, and I think that it would have gone very hard with me if a party of five or six prizefighters had not broken into the house, pretty nearly killed the men in whose hands I was, and rescued me. They said that they had heard of my danger from a foreign sailor who called at Gibbons', with whom I was in the habit of boxing, and told him about it. You see, until they learned where the jewels were, my life was valuable to them, for possibly I was the only person who knew where they were hidden; so really I don't think I have any reason for bearing a grudge against them. They saved my life in the first place, and spared it at what was a distinct risk to themselves. On the other hand, they were content with regaining the bracelet, not even, as I told you, taking my watch or purse. You see, with them it was a matter of religion. They had no animosity against me personally, but I have no doubt they would have stabbed me without the slightest compunction had there been no other way of getting the things. Still, I think that I owe a debt of gratitude to them rather than the reverse, and, after all, the loss of the bracelet is not a serious one to us."

"I am glad it is gone," Millicent said. "You say it had already caused the death of two men, and if you had succeeded in selling it I can't help thinking that the money would have brought ill-fortune to us. I am heartily glad that the diamonds are gone, Mark. I suppose they were very handsome?"

"They were magnificent," he said. "Dick and Cotter both agreed that they had never seen their equal, and I fancy that they must have been worth a great deal more than your father valued them at."

"Well, it does not matter at all. There is no history attached to the others, I hope, Mark?"

"Not in any way, dear. They were bought, as the Colonel told my father, in the ordinary course of things, and some, no doubt, were obtained at the capture of some

of the native princes' treasuries; but it was solely on account of this bracelet that he had any anxiety. You can wear all the others, if you have a fancy for keeping them, without a shadow of risk."

"No, Mark, we will sell them every one. I don't think that I shall ever care to wear any jewels again; and if I am ever presented at court and have to do so, I would rather that you should buy some new ones fresh from a jeweler's shop than wear anything that has come from India."

"To-morrow you shall both go to the bank with me to see them, and then I will take them to some first-class jeweler's and get him to value them."

The visit was paid next day. Both Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham were somewhat disappointed at the jewels.

"It is hardly fair to see them like this," Philip Cotter said. "They would look very different if reset. No Indian jewels I have ever seen show to advantage in their native settings; but many of the stones are very large, and without knowing anything about them I should say that they are worth the £50,000 at which you say Colonel Thorndyke valued them. He was not likely to be mistaken. He was evidently a judge of these matters, and would hardly be likely to be far wrong."

"We will go with you to the jeweler's, Mark," Millicent said. "In the first place, I shall not feel quite comfortable until I know that they are out of your hands, and in the next place I should like to hear what he thinks of them."

"I have a number of Indian jewels that I wish you to value for me," Mark said, as, carrying the case, he entered the jeweler's shop. "They were collected by Colonel Thorndyke, an uncle of mine, during service in India."

The jeweler took them with him into a room behind the shop. The case was opened, and the man took out sixty-eight small parcels it contained, and opened them one after the other.

"I shall need a very careful examination of these before I can form any estimate of their value," he said, after inspecting some of the more important pieces of jewelry carefully. "They are a most magnificent collection, and

had they been properly cut in the first place they would have been worth a very large sum. Unfortunately, the Indian princes think more of size than of lustre, and have their stones cut very much too flat to show off their full brilliancy. Some of these large ones I should certainly advise to be re-cut, for what they will lose in weight they will gain in beauty and value. However, sir, I will go through them and give you an estimate of the selling value of each piece. I need not say that they ought all to be reset in the prevailing fashion; but the gold, which is in some cases unnecessarily massive, will go some distance towards defraying the expense."

"When shall I call again?" Mark asked.

"I should be glad if you can give me a week," the jeweler said. "Some of the things, for instance that great pearl necklace, I could appraise without much difficulty, but all the gems must be taken out of their settings before I could form a fair idea of their value."

"Then I will call in a week's time," Mark said. "I am in no particular hurry about them, but I would rather that they were in your care than mine."

"Yes, if the cracksmen got word that there was such a collection as this in any private house it would need a couple of men with pistols to keep guard over them."

A week later Mark again called.

"I have the list ready for you, sir; you will see that they are not marked according to their setting, but according to their size and value. Thus, you see, the largest stones are priced separately; the smaller ones are in groups according to their weight. The total comes to £42,000. I do not know whether that at all equals your expectations. I may say that I have shown the stones to two or three of our principal diamond merchants, and that the prices I have put down are those at which they would be willing to buy them; possibly some would be worth more. I had the merchants here together, and they spent some hours going through them, and the sums put down are those at which one or other were willing to purchase."

"It quite answers my expectations," Mark said. "My uncle's estimate, indeed, was somewhat higher, but doubt-

less he judged them at the price which they would fetch in India. Well, sir, I authorize you to close with the offers, and to dispose of them for me. I will give you a written authority to do so. In the meantime, I wish to buy a suite of jewels as a wedding present, a tiara, necklace, and bracelets; but I do not want any diamonds to be among them."

"I am afraid I have nothing in stock without diamonds; of course, I have both necklaces and bracelets of almost any stones that you might select, but I have no complete set without diamonds; the effect would be somber, and few ladies would like them."

"We have some unpleasant associations with diamonds," Mark said, "and on that point I am quite determined; but if you used pearls instead of diamonds the effect might be as good. I don't care whether the stones are emeralds or rubies; at any rate, I should like to see some, and then perhaps you might be able to make me a set on the same model."

Several superb sets were brought in; Mark selected one of emeralds and diamonds.

"What would be the price of this set?" he asked.

"That set is £6000, sir; the stones are exceptionally fine ones; but if you substituted pearls of equal size for the diamonds, it would cost considerably less; I could not give you the exact price until it is made, but I should say that it would be about £4500."

"Very well, then, I will take that. How long will it be making?"

"I should not like to say less than three months at the earliest; it will require some time to collect as fine a set of emeralds as these. Indeed, I think that most probably I shall use these emeralds, or the greater part of them, and collect others to take their places at my leisure. I do not know whether the best plan would not be to take the diamonds out and substitute pearls; there would be no difficulty in getting them, and in that case I might have it ready for you in a month."

"I think that will be the best plan; but you need not be in any particular hurry about them. My marriage will take place in less than a fortnight, and after that I shall

probably be three or four months before I return to London. I will get you to keep the things until I come back."

"I have sold the jewels, Millicent," he said, when he returned to Islington; "the jeweler has found purchasers for them all, and the total comes to £42,000."

"Whatever shall we do with all our money, Mark?"

"I rather wonder myself, dear. However, there is one thing, there are always plenty of people who will be glad to relieve us of anything that we don't want. I can tell you that in the course of my search for Bastow I have seen an amount of poverty and misery such as I never dreamt of, and I certainly should like to do something to relieve it. The best thing that I know of would be to give a handsome sum to three or four of the great hospitals. I don't know of any better means of helping the very poor."

"Suppose, Mark," the girl said, putting her hand on his arm, "we give this £42,000 as a thank-offering. We never expected to get it, and my father's jewels have nearly cost you your life. We have such an abundance without that, I should like, above all things, to give this money away."

"I think that is an excellent plan, Millicent, and a very happy thought on your part. We cannot do it now, as we have not yet got the money, but as soon as we do we will send off checks for 10,000 guineas each to St. Bartholomew's, Guy's, and St. Thomas'—those are the three principal ones; the others we can settle afterwards. But I should say that the Foundling would be as good as any, and I believe that they are rather short of funds at present; then there is the London Mendicity Society, and many other good charities. Perhaps it would be better to divide the whole among eight of them instead of four; but we need not settle that until we return."

"Do you think we shall have to go to this horrid Amsterdam, Mark?"

"I hope not, dear; but I shall no doubt hear from the Lieutenant of the watch during the next week or ten days."

When the letter came it was satisfactory. The pris-

oners, seeing the hopelessness of any defense, had all admitted their guilt, and the name of the man who had dealt with them had also been given up. Except in his case there would be no trial. The others would have sentences passed on them at once, and three, who had been promised comparatively slight punishment, would go into the box to give evidence against the man who had engaged them. Before starting for Holland Mark had consulted Millicent as to whether she would prefer being married in London or at Crowswood. She had replied:

"I should greatly prefer Crowswood, Mark. Here we know no one, there we should be among all our friends; certainly if we don't go we must get Mr. Greg to come up and marry us here. I am sure he would feel very disappointed if anyone else were asked. At the same time I should not like to go home. When we come back from our trip it will be different; but it would be a great trial now, and however happy we might be, I should feel there was a gloom over the house."

"I quite agree with you, Millicent. When we come back we can see about entirely refurnishing it, and, perhaps, adding some rooms to it, and we need not go down until a complete change has been made. We shall be able to manage it somehow or other, and I quite agree with you that anything will be better than going back to the house for a day or two before the wedding."

On the voyage back from Holland Mark had talked the matter over with Dick Chetwynd, and said that he thought of taking rooms for Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent at Reigate, and stopping at the hotel himself, and having the wedding breakfast there.

"Of course, Dick, you will be my best man."

"I should think so," Dick laughed. "Why, if you had asked anyone else I should have made a personal matter of it with him, and have given him the option of resigning the position or going out with me. But your other plans are foolish, and I shall take the matter into my own hands; I shall insist upon the two ladies coming down to the Park, and I will get my aunt to come and preside generally over things. I shall fill up the house with bridesmaids, and shall have a dance the evening

before. You can put up at the hotel if you like, but you know very well that there are a dozen houses where they will be delighted to have you; there is no doubt that when they know what is coming off you will get a dozen invitations, and then after church all those invited will drive off to the Park to the wedding breakfast. After that is over you can start in a post-chaise to Canterbury or Dover, wherever you may decide to make your first halt."

"But, my dear Dick, I could not put you to all this trouble!"

"Nonsense, man. I should enjoy it immensely; besides, I shall be really glad of a good reason to try and open the doors of the Park again. I have been there very little since my father's death, and I think I shall make it my headquarters in future. I am getting rather tired of bachelor life in London, and must look out for a wife; so nothing could be more appropriate than this idea. Don't bother yourself any further about it. I shall ride down and establish myself there to-morrow, spend a couple of days in driving round to our friends and in sending out invitations. I shall still have nearly a fortnight for making all preparations. Why, it will cause quite an excitement in the neighborhood! I shall be hailed as a benefactor, and I shall let everyone know that your father's ward was really your cousin, but that by the will of her father she was to drop her surname until she came of age; and that until that time your father was to have the entire control of the property. I shall add that although the estate, of course, is hers, your uncle has left you a very big fortune, and that nothing could be more suitable in all respects than the marriage."

"That will do excellently, Dick; that will be quite enough, without going into details at all. You can mention that we intend to have the house entirely refurnished, and on the return from our wedding trip abroad to settle there. I am sure I am extremely obliged to you for your offer, which will certainly clear away all sorts of small difficulties."

A day or two after his return Mark wrote to Mr. Greg, telling him the relations in which Millicent and he

stood to each other, and of the near approach of their marriage. He said that Millicent would be married from Dick Chetwynd's, but that it would be at Crowswood church. In return he received a warm letter of congratulation from the Rector, telling him that the news was in every respect delightful, and that his wife and the children were in a state of the highest excitement, not only at the marriage, but at their coming down to reside again at Crowswood.

"The village," he said, "will be scarcely less pleased than I am, for though everything goes on as you ordered, and the people get their milk, broths, and jellies as before, they don't look at it as the same thing as it was in the old days. I cannot say that the news of your engagement to Miss Conyers—I ought to say Miss Thorndyke—is surprising, for I had thought that it would be quite the natural thing for you to fall in love with each other, and, indeed, my wife declares that she saw it coming on distinctly during the last few months before you left here. Your postscript saying that Bastow had been captured and had committed suicide gave me a distinct feeling of relief, for no one could tell whether the deadly enmity that he felt for your father might not extend to you. I have cut this note rather short, but I have just heard the door shut, and I am quite sure that my wife has gone down to tell the good news in the village, and I really cannot deny myself the pleasure of telling some of the people myself, and seeing their faces brighten up at the news."

As Dick had foretold would be the case, Mark received a very warm letter from Sir Charles Harris, congratulating him upon his approaching marriage, and insisting upon his taking up his quarters with him.

"I am sending a man down with this to hand it to the guard as the up coach goes through the town. Chetwynd told me that his call on me was the first he had paid, so I feel fairly confident that I shall forestall the rest of your friends, and that you will give me the pleasure of your company."

Mark wrote back accepting the invitation at once, which enabled him to decline half a dozen others without

the necessity of making a choice. Everything turned out as arranged. Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham went down in a post-chaise, two days before the wedding, and Mark drove down in his gig with them. Dick Chetwynd met them on horseback just outside Reigate, and escorted the ladies to his house, Mark driving on to that of Sir Charles Harris. Millicent found the house full of her special friends, whom she had asked to be her bridesmaids. She was almost bewildered by the warmth of their welcome, and overpowered by the questions poured upon her.

"The news quite took all our breath away, Millicent," one of them said. "It seems extraordinary that you should have been Miss Thorndyke all the time, though I don't think that any of us were at all surprised that you should take the name now; you must have been surprised when you heard that you were the heiress of Crowswood."

"I was a great deal more disgusted than surprised," she said rather indignantly. "I did not think that it was fair at all that I should step into Mark's shoes."

"Well, it has all come right now, Millicent, and I dare say you thought that it would, even then."

"I can assure you that I did not; quite the contrary, I thought that it never would come right. I was very unhappy about it for a time."

"Now, young ladies," Dick Chetwynd laughed, "will you please take Mrs. Cunningham and Miss Thorndyke up to their rooms? I don't suppose I shall see any more of you before dinner-time; there are those trunks to be opened and examined, talked over, and admired. Mind, I have fifteen more, for the most part men, coming to dinner, so those of you who aspire to follow Miss Thorndyke's example had best prepare yourselves for conquest."

The ball on the following evening was a great success. Dick had determined that it should be a memorable one, and there was a consensus of opinion that it was the most brilliant that had taken place in that part of the country for many years.

Crowswood church and village presented a most festive appearance on the following day; there was not a cottage that had not great posies of flowers in its windows, and that had not made some sort of attempt at decoration

with flags or flowers. A huge arch of evergreens, with sheaves of wheat and flowers, had been erected on the top of the hill, and every man, woman, and child turned out in their best, and cheered lustily, first, when Mark drove up in his gig, and equally lustily when the Chetwynd carriage, drawn by four gray horses, dashed up, preceded by a large number of others with the bridesmaids and friends. The church was already crowded, and Mr. Greg was visibly moved at seeing the son and niece of the man to whom he owed his living made man and wife. When the wedding breakfast, at which more than fifty sat down, and the necessary toasts were over, Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke started for Canterbury.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was not until Easter that Mark Thorndyke and his wife returned to England. They had spent the greater portion of that time in Italy, lingering for a month at Venice, and had then journeyed quietly homewards through Bavaria and Saxony. They were in no hurry, as before starting on their honeymoon Mark had consulted an architect, had told him exactly what he wanted, and had left the matter in his hands. Mrs. Cunningham had from time to time kept them informed how things were going on. The part of the house in which the Squire's room had been situated was entirely pulled down, and a new wing built in its stead. Millicent had been specially wishful that this should be done.

"I don't know that I am superstitious, Mark," she had said, "but I do think that when a murder has taken place in a house it is better to make a complete change. The servants always think they see or hear something. That part of the house is avoided, and it is difficult to get anyone to stay there. I think it is very much more important to do that than it is to get the house refurnished; we can do anything in that way you like when we get back, but I should certainly like very much to have the great alteration made before we return."

The architect was a clever one, and the house, which was some two hundred years old, was greatly improved in appearance by the new wing, which was made to harmonize well with the rest, but was specially designed to give as much variety as possible to the general outline. Millicent uttered an exclamation of pleasure when they first caught a glimpse of the house. As they rode through the village they were again welcomed as heartily as they were on their wedding day. Mrs. Cunningham received them; she had been established there for a month, and had placed the house entirely on its old footing. They