

possible." "Certainly," said Flynn, "I'm going to Ostend." "Good for you. Newspaper accounts shall be evidence; but send me the whole paper, and mark another passage, not the one referring to the bet."

"O intellectual subtlety and stamina!"

"Have some more coffee?"

"Thanks."

An hour later each, in his appointed lighthouse, was indicating the sure path of virtue and justice to the admiring English.

## II

The Trinity sittings were over. Sir Richard Ffoulkes—for the king's birthday had not left him without honor—was contemplating his wig and gown with disgust. On the table before him was a large leather book, containing many colored flies; and he had just assured himself that his seventeen-foot split cane was in good order. In fact, he had been boyish enough to test the check on his Hardy reel by practicing casts out of the window, to the alarm of the sparrows. It was the common routine for him on the brink of a holiday, but it never lost its freshness.

Then there came back to him the realization that this was to be no ordinary holiday. He was pledged to do murder.

He went over to the mirror, and studied his face steadily. He was perfectly calm; no trace of excitement showed in his keen features. "I have always thought," he mused, "that the crises of life are usually determined by accident. It is not possible to foresee events with mathematical accuracy, and in big things it is the small things that count. Hence the cleverest criminal may always make some slip, and the clumsiest escape by a piece of luck. Let me never forget the story of the officer at Gibraltar who, focussing a new field-glass, chanced to pick up a shepherd in the very act of crime. On the other hand, how many men have got clear away through stupid people disturbing or destroying the clues: from Jack the Ripper downwards! But it is the motive that counts. Where that does not exist, the strongest clues lead nowhere. For our surest faith is that men's actions are founded upon reason or upon desire. Hence the utter impossibility of guarding against lunatics or anarchists. I should hardly believe the evidence of my senses in such a case as this: Suppose the Master of the Rolls dropped in to see me, and in the course of a perfectly sound conversation, broke up my fishing-rod without explanation or apology, and, when questioned, calmly denied that he had done so. Who would believe my story? Hence I think that I could walk into the Strand, shoot a perfect stranger in the crowd, and throw away the gun, with no danger of being caught, provided only that the gun could not be traced to me. The evidence of those who saw me fire would be torn to pieces in cross-examination; they could even be made to disbelieve their own eyes.

"From this I draw these conclusions as to the proper conditions for my murder: First, there must be no conceivable reason for the act; second, there must be no way of tracing the weapon to my possession. I need not trouble to hide my traces, except in obvious matters like blood; for it is exceedingly stupid to attempt to prove a false alibi. In fact, there is no bigger booby-trap for a criminal, *pace* the indignant ghost of Mr. Weller, Senior.

"My plan is therefore a simple one; I have only

to get hold of a weapon without detection, and use it upon an inoffensive stranger at any time when there happens to be nobody looking—though this is not so important."

He returned to his fishing tackle. "It's rather a big bet, though," he added; "there's more than a thousand pounds to it. I think I will be pretty careful over details. Practice may not be quite so simple as theory!"

However, the first part of his programme turned out to be delightfully easy. It was his custom to train during the holiday by taking long walks, on his way to the lake or river where he fished. He detested motor-cars. As luck would have it, during the first week, as he tramped a lonely road, his eye was caught by an object lying on the ground. It was a heavy motor spanner, evidently left behind by some chauffeur who had had a breakdown. His mind instantly grasped the situation. There was no one in sight. The spanner was already rusted, had lain there some days. Any of a hundred people might have picked it up. It could never be traced to him. He had never possessed such a tool in his life; besides, the pattern was common. He thrust it quickly into his pocket. When he got home, he packed it away carefully in his traveling cashbox, a solid steel affair of which there was but one key, which never left his chain. "Now," said he, "the problem is to find the inoffensive stranger. I had better leave Scotland. Every one in Scotland is offensive. Also, in the matter of motive, our common humanity urges us all to kill Scotchmen. So goodbye, land o' cakes!"

Further meditations were in this key following: since he was to kill with the spanner, certain precautions must be taken. It must be a very clean kill, with no outcry or struggle. At the end of his cogitations, he decided that the victim had better be asleep. His legally trained mind had snapped its last link with the idea of adventure or sport; his motto was "safety first." His attitude to his projected crime was simply that of preparing a brief; he wished to meet every contingency; the atrocity of his proceedings was invisible to his intellectuality. Reason is perfectly amoral.

It was on his way from Edinburgh to London that the brilliant idea occurred to him. He would kill old Miss Marsden! She was now Mrs. Robinson, by the way, for she had testified to the faith that was in her by marrying her protégé directly after his acquittal. Ffoulkes knew the house well; he had stayed there several days while working up the case. It was a lonely place, and the old lady was a fresh-air fiend, and slept on the veranda, winter and summer. She was perfectly friendly, had paid most liberally for the defense. Everything was in his favor. Even if Ezra happened to see the murder committed, his tongue was tied; indeed, he stood the strongest chance of being arrested for it himself. The servants slept far away from the veranda, at the other end of the old rambling house; there were no neighbors, and no dogs. His presence in the vicinity would excite no remark, for there was good dry-fly fishing in the streams. He would rent a cottage in the district for the second half of his holiday, walk over the downs, five miles or so, nothing to him, one moonless night, do the job, and walk back. A thousand to one that no one would know that he had ever left his cottage.

On this plan he acted. The only additional precau-