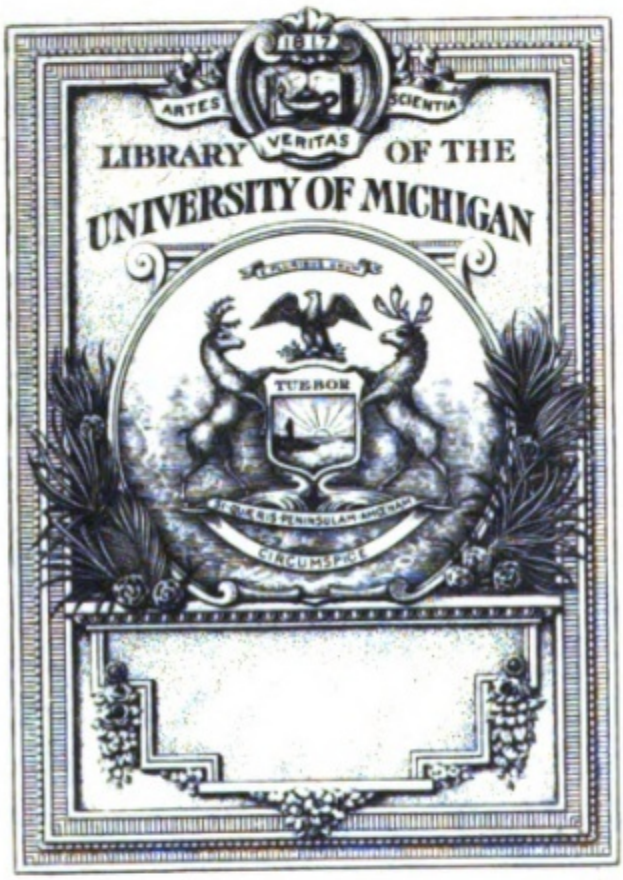
A 507035

CONSTABLE
Guard Thyself!

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



BEQUEST OF
ORMA FITCH BUTLER, PH.D., '07
PROFESSOR OF LATIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CONSTABLE GUARD THYSELF!

Digitized by Google

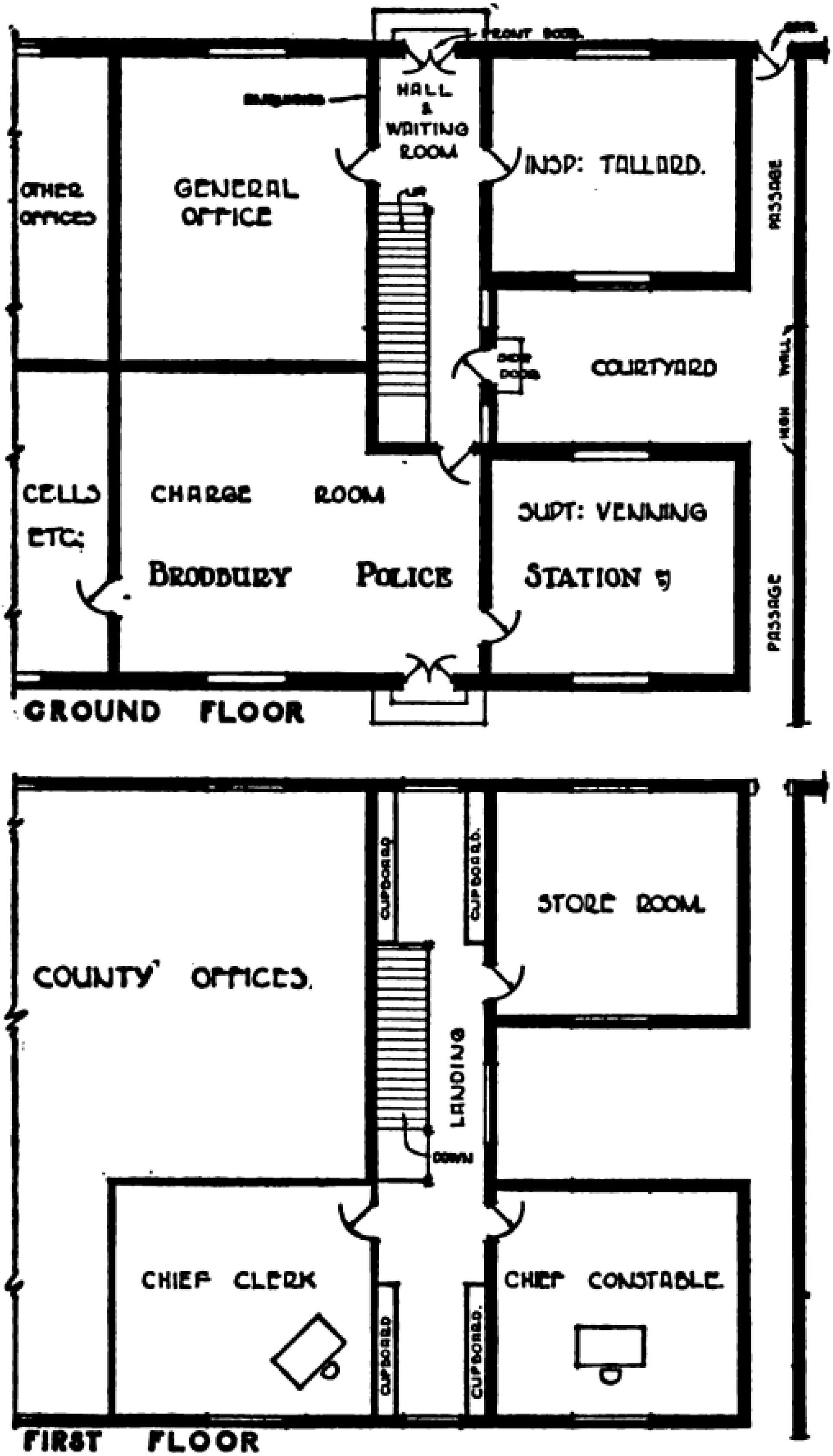
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Mercy - Fiction, Henry Kane

CONSTABLE GUARD THYSELF!

A Detective Story

by

HENRY WADE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1935

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CONSTABLE GUARD THYSELF!

CHAPTER I

AN OLD STORY

"THIS is my Chief Clerk's office, General."

Captain Scole, Chief Constable of Brodshire, threw open the door of a small ill-lit room, lined with shelves and filing cabinets. A uniformed police-officer, who was sitting at the big roll-top desk, rose quickly to his feet and stood to attention.

"Ah, it's you, Inspector; I'd forgotten Mr. Jason was going off this afternoon."

Captain Scole turned to his companion, a rather short, military-looking man with brushed-up moustache too large for his body, and bright blue eyes.

"This is Inspector Tallard, who acts as deputy to the Chief Clerk. Superintendent Jason is away for two or three days for his sister's wedding. I'll introduce him to you some other time. Wretched room this; I'm hoping to persuade your Committee to build us some new headquarters when things get better."

The General, however, was taking less interest in the room than in its occupant.

"Have we met before, Inspector?" he asked. "Were you in the Brodshires? I'm General Cawdon; I commanded the 7th Battalion in '18."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

As General Cawdon spoke, a quick flash of recognition had passed over the Inspector's face. He was a well-built man of medium height, with a firm mouth and close-clipped moustache. After that one flash his face settled again into the rather wooden expression that was evidently habitual to it.

"Not in the Brodshires, sir," he replied, "but I did serve under you for a few days in '18—on the Somme."

Captain Scole pricked up his ears.

"That's interesting," he said. "You never told me that, Tallard. I was in the County Regiment myself, before I became a policeman, as I expect you know. General Cawdon and I were in the same battalion in . . . what was it, General . . . '05, '06?"

"1906; I joined you in India, you remember, from the 1st Battalion. That was just after poor Jack Smiley and little Patterson were killed on the frontier."

"That's right, of course; I remember. General Cawdon has just joined the Standing Joint Committee, Inspector, so we must pull ourselves together or we'll be in the book."

General Cawdon gave a short, hearty laugh.

"It would be a change for me, Scole," he said. "I was your junior by four or five years. But look here, Inspector, I want to hear more about this. How did you come to serve under me if you weren't in the Regiment?"

"It was after the German offensive had started, sir—the March show. I'd joined the London Fusiliers at the end of '17 and I was sent out with a big draft the moment it began. The base camp was

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

packed with reinforcements, all in an awful muddle, and we were pushed off anywhere we were wanted, regardless of regiment—at least, that's what it looked like to us. Anyway, I and about a dozen other Fusiliers found ourselves with a draft going up to the 7th Brodshires, and we landed in the middle of it and nearly all got scuppered before we were straightened out."

General Cawdon's face had for the moment lost some of its bird-like exuberance.

"Yes, yes, I remember now," he muttered. "Poor devils, we hardly got their names on the books. Where was it? Beauchamps?"

"That's right, sir. Beauchamps-sur-Somme."

"My God, Scole; it was an awful time, that," said the General. "We'd been cut to pieces behind St. Quentin and were pushed back—what was left of us—day after day for what seemed like weeks. They sent us up a big draft that joined us on the Somme, a bit east of Villers-Bretonneux—men from several different units as well as Brodshires—I'd forgotten for the moment. We had no time even to sort them out into companies; the Huns attacked us again that very night and we had to put them straight in. These fellows fought like veterans for three days and then the line broke on our left and the Germans got behind us. Damned few of us got back. You, I take it, were one, Tallard?"

Inspector Tallard shook his head.

"No, sir; I was taken prisoner."

"You were? Then how the devil do I remember your face, if you were only with me those two or three days?"

Again Tallard shook his head.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Don't see how you could, sir; not possibly."

"Extraordinary . . . must have . . . by Jove, I remember. I put you in for an M.M.! I remember you well now. You're the fellow that bombed a German machine gun that had got behind us . . . knocked 'em out. I put you in . . . Good God, did I? . . . or did I only mean to? I remember meaning to, but we were so much disorganized . . . I got a bit knocked out myself . . . that I can't remember whether it ever went through."

Inspector Tallard had stiffened.

"No, sir; you're mistaken. I never bombed any German machine gun. I fired a good many rounds at a lot of them, like we all did. Then when they got behind us nearly all our platoon were killed and I was taken prisoner."

General Cawdon shook his head.

"Well, you ought to know", he said. "I seem to remember. May have been some other fellow. Anyway, I'm glad to have met you. You must tell me all about yourself another time. I must be getting back, Scole. Very good of you to have shown me round."

He turned on his heel and walked out of the room. Captain Scole saw that his face was rather grey, his carriage less erect, as if the memory of that nightmare on the Somme had sapped his vitality. The Chief Constable followed him out.

"Very good of you to come, General. You'll be a great help. . . ."

His voice died away down the stairs. Inspector Tallard stood for a time staring at the closed door. Even his expressionless face seemed to reflect some memory of the hideous past. With a stiffening of

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the shoulders he sat down and pressed a bell. A young constable appeared.

"Take these notes about Albert Hinde. Got your book?"

"Yes, sir."

The constable pulled forward a chair and sat down, an open note-book on his knee.

"Released from Fieldhurst 14th October '33 on expiration of sentence, three months remission only. Gave his address as 13 Park Road, Woolham, Chassex. Chassex Police report he arrived there on 15th but left again on 5th inst, reporting no change of address. As he was convicted in Brodshire it is thought . . ."

The young constable looked up.

"Hinde? Isn't that the chap that killed a keeper, sir?"

"You attend to your shorthand, young fellow, and leave me to do the talking", said the Inspector, shortly. "It is thought that he may . . ."

A bell buzzed gently.

"That's the Chief. Hold on", said Inspector Tallard, rising to his feet. "No, you better get down; I may be some time."

He collected some papers and crossed the passage to the Chief Constable's room. Captain Scole was standing with his back to the fire-place, looking at a telegram he held in his hand. He was a big man with crisp, grizzled hair and a stubble moustache. His jaw was square and his tight-shut mouth gave an impression of stubborn determination which was in no way lessened by cold, very light grey eyes. He was fifty-nine years old but showed no signs of losing grip.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"There's a telegram from Mr. Jason. His sister's ill and the wedding postponed. I've wired him to stay till Sunday night in any case; glad to be with her, I expect."

"Yes, sir. Will you sign now, sir?"

Captain Scole moved to his desk.

"Interesting your having been attached to the Regiment. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did, sir, when I joined the Force. This is the car mileage return; South Eastern Division are up a good bit this month, but they've had all that Foot and Mouth."

Inspector Tallard's voice maintained an expressionless level, whether he was talking about himself, or a murder, or a clothing indent. The Chief Constable thought him a dull fellow, though quietly efficient.

"Your father was a Brodshire man. Why didn't you join his regiment?"

"I was working in London as a lad, sir, and had been at school there. Everyone was joining The Londons; it seemed the natural thing to do."

The Chief Constable grunted but made no comment. There were a good many papers to be signed and for ten minutes he was busy. But the subject seemed to be rankling, because presently he put down his pen and, leaning back in his chair, looked at his subordinate.

"Your father was the smartest Company-Sergeant-Major in the battalion; he taught me most of what I knew. That was why I was glad to take you on in the Constabulary. You never thought of following in his footsteps?—long service, I mean, and promotion?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I always wanted to be a policeman, sir. Seemed to me more useful than soldiering—peace-time soldiering. I'm grateful to you for taking me on, sir. I know there can't have been many vacancies then, with your own men coming back from the war."

"There weren't. I don't think we took anyone else—no recruits, I mean—till well on in '20."

"I was lucky, sir. There's that question of young Wastable . . . cattle-maiming, you remember, sir. He was up before the Looseley Bench this morning. They wanted to send him to a reformatory, but under the new Children and Young Persons Act they can only send him to an approved school. They want to know if we can tell them of one that'll do him good."

The Chief Constable grunted.

"Not our job; the Magistrate's Clerk must see about that. Perfect nonsense, of course, about the police keeping out of it; we're the only people these young scoundrels are afraid of. The cat's what they want."

"Yes, sir. That's all to-night, sir."

Inspector Tallard gathered up his papers and made for the door. The Chief Constable fidgeted with his pen, then looked up quickly, as if he had come to a decision.

"Half a minute, Tallard", he said. "Mr. Jason was saying something to me this morning about a man called Hinde who's just been released from Fieldhurst. There was some question of the Chassex police having lost touch with him. I take it he's on licence. Do you know anything about it?"

"Only what we got from the Chassex police, sir. The man reported to them on release and said he

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

was going to stay in Woolham for a bit. Now they say he's left home without notifying his change of address in accordance with regulations. They think that as he was convicted here he may have come this way. I understand he had a bad record at Fieldhurst, sir, and only earned three months' remission. Violent, I believe he was."

The Chief Constable frowned.

"Yes, a dangerous fellow, I should think. Can't think why the Home Secretary wanted to interfere with the sentence. The Governor told me some time ago that he seemed to be deliberately making trouble so as not to get remission. Didn't want to have to report, I suppose. No doubt that was why they did give him the three months, in spite of his behaviour."

"Looks like it, sir", said Inspector Tallard, his hand on the door.

But Captain Scole appeared disinclined to let him go.

"Case was before your time, of course," he said, leaning back and filling a pipe. "Murdered a keeper and was sentenced to death, but the Home Secretary advised His Majesty to commute—God knows why—something about possible grounds for doubting premeditation. Hinde's brother, a youngster, and another man got five years as accessories. They were both killed in the war, I believe. Funny sort of justice that this fellow, the real murderer, should be the one to survive and now be able to go about making more trouble."

"I expect he's had his lesson, sir", said the Inspector, patiently. He had more work to do before he could get off duty.

"I doubt it, but we'll hope so. You're sending

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

out an information? Better keep tabs on him if he comes this way. Well, I'll be off now. I shall be going straight home in case you want me again. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

After the door had closed, Captain Scole sat for some time, staring at the blotting paper in front of him. Presently he pulled open the drawer on the right of his desk and took out an automatic pistol. After examining the charger he half slipped the weapon into his pocket, hesitated, pulled it out again and, with a muttered 'Pah!', threw it back into the drawer, which he shut. Probably he felt the half-shamefaced dislike of the melodramatic which is common to the normal Englishman, but he was conscious of doubting his own wisdom as he walked downstairs and out into the November night.

There are still left in England some men and women who prefer driving a horse to a motor-car. Captain Anthony Scole was one of these. For duty, of course—for the huge mileage that he had to cover in the course of his work—a car was essential, but for pleasure—and in this he included the five miles to and from office and home, and for which he charged the County nothing—he kept a smart bay mare and a low rubber-tyred dog-cart, which for years had been a well-known feature of the Brodbury neighbourhood. The mare, of course, changed from time to time, but her name remained; the present occupant of the shafts was Bessie III, as like as a pin to the two Bessies that had in the past twenty years preceded her, so that many people believed that the Chief Constable's stables possessed the secret of perpetual youth.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

It did not take George, the ostler at the 'Bampton Arms', many minutes to 'put in', and while he bustled about he talked and 'the Captain' listened. Ostlers are still a feature of the bigger inns in market towns and the Chief Constable was not above picking up stray bits of gossip that always found their way into the stable yard; more than one useful hint had filtered through to Police Headquarters by this channel.

With a cheery good-night to George and a 'Come up, lass' to Bessie, Captain Scole turned out into the square and, answering the salute of the constable on traffic control duty, drove quietly through the crowded streets till he was clear of the town. Out in the open country only a touch of whip on shoulder was needed to put the mare into her top speed and the hedges soon began to fly past in the deepening twilight. Soon there appeared ahead the dark masses of the Brodley Woods, and the sight of them brought back to Captain Scole the details of the twenty-year-old story he had just been discussing with Inspector Tallard.

When he was appointed in 1912 Brodshire was suffering from a severe epidemic of poaching. Gangs of men from the big neighbouring port of Greymouth were in the habit of 'working' the well-stocked coverts for which Brodshire was famous, becoming each season more daring and even violent. It was largely to fight this growing menace that the Standing Joint Committee of Brodshire—land-owners almost to a man—had decided that the time had come to appoint a younger and more vigorous man to the Chief Constableship, in place of dear old Colonel Breddington, who had served the County so

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

well and so tactfully in the more tranquil days of Victoria and Edward.

Captain Anthony Scole had owed his selection in no small degree to the reputation for fearlessness and determination which he had built up for himself during his five years' police service in a by no means tranquil corner of India. His stubborn jaw and hard mouth were in themselves guarantee that he would deal faithfully with disturbers of the peace of Brodshire. On taking up his duties he had soon realised that the poaching problem needed not only firmer handling but better organisation. It did not take him long to get to know the various keepers who were suffering from overwhelming odds and inadequate support; these gallant men quickly responded to encouragement and were only too willing to co-operate with the police in an organised campaign, and before long this was working smoothly and poaching became a much less easy and profitable business. But it did not stop, and Scole soon realised that a fine or a few days' or weeks' imprisonment was not enough to deter men from a pursuit that combined profit, sport, and the exhilaration of risk. What was needed was an example, and the Chief Constable was determined to get it.

Twenty years later, with years of experience and mellowing age behind him, Anthony Scole did not feel quite so happy as he had at the time about the circumstances which led up to the death of Keeper Love and the passing of a death sentence upon his slayer. Then he had been overwhelmed with delight at his own cleverness and at the luck which made such a sentence possible. Love had been a pawn in the game; his death meant little to a man like

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Scole. The death—the execution—of the poacher Hinde would have meant much; even the life-long imprisonment to which the sentence had been commuted was enough to bring the poaching epidemic to an abrupt end, though Scole, for reasons of his own, would have preferred the man out of his way altogether.

Now the whole thing, so long almost forgotten, had been brought back to the forefront of his mind by the release, after nearly twenty years, of Albert Hinde, and the suggestion that he might be making his way back to the neighbourhood in which his tragedy had happened. Here, in these very woods whose trees now formed a tunnel over his head, Hinde's gun had blown Keeper Love's head into a bloody pulp and the Brodshire police, rushing out from their ambush, had had easy work in overpowering the three horrified and bewildered men who stood looking down upon the still quivering body. Luck for the police that had been, luck that he himself had been present and able to give the damning evidence that had defeated the attempt of the defence to whittle murder down to manslaughter. That evidence. It had needed courage—moral courage. He was risking his whole career . . .

With a sudden swerve, Bessie flung herself to one side of the road as a figure jumped out from the other with uplifted arms. Instinctively Scole reined back, pulling the mare almost on to her haunches. As he did so, the man in the road seized the bridle.

"Let go that rein!" exclaimed Scole sharply.

The man peered up at him, shading his eyes with his free hand against the glare of the candle-lamps, bright in the deep blackness of the woods.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Just a minute, Captain. I see it's you all right."

"Who are you? What the devil d'you want?"

The man removed his hand from his eyes.

"Have a look at me, Captain. P'raps you'll know me again."

The lamplight fell upon a coarse, brutal face, with thickened nose and broken teeth. A week-old stubble on cheeks and jaw blurred the outline, but Scole realised that this must be the man of whom he had just been thinking. With a beating heart, he cursed his folly in not bringing his pistol.

"I've no idea who you are. Let go of that rein at once."

"Twenty years inside may have spoilt my beauty a bit, but I reckon you know me, Captain. I've not forgotten you, anyway; you can bet your life on that . . . if you think it's worth a bet!"

The man's tone left no doubt as to the meaning of the last words. Captain Scole felt the tightening at the throat which had always come to him before when he was in an awkward corner. This might be just talk, but it might well be more—and he was defenceless. With a quick movement he transferred his whip to his left hand and thrust the right into the pocket of his driving coat.

"Put your hands up!" he snapped, tugging at an imaginary weapon in his pocket.

For a second the man hesitated, then jumped back off the road and disappeared into the gloom of the wood.

Captain Scole gave a short laugh.

"Damn' funk", he exclaimed aloud, then whipped up Bessie and drove on without a glance behind him.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER II

GONE AWAY

A LITTLE before nine on the following morning,* a boy wearing the red and yellow cap of Brodbury Grammar School, leant his bicycle against the outer wall of Police Headquarters and looked doubtfully at the closed door. His heart was beating a shade faster than usual, but he concealed his nervousness even from himself and, seeing no bell, turned the handle and walked in. The waiting-room in which he found himself was empty, but there was a small window marked 'Enquiries', and on this he tapped. Through the glass he saw a constable rise from his desk, approach the window, and throw it open.

"What is your trouble, my lad?"

"No trouble. A man gave me this note to give to the Chief Constable."

The constable took the rather grubby envelope and turned it over with faint signs of disgust.

"What sort of a man? Does it want an answer?"

"I don't know. He just stopped me and asked if I was going into Brodbury. I come from Petsham. I'm going to the Grammar School. I ought to go on, please; it's nearly nine."

"Half a mo. You don't know who this chap was?"

"No."

"All right. You'll have to wait while I give it to the Inspector."

* Thursday, 9th November, 1933.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The boy began to look anxious.

"But I shall get into trouble if I'm late."

"I shan't be a minute. Sit down in there."

The constable shut the window and presently re-appeared in the waiting-room on his way upstairs. In a minute he was back.

"Inspector says you can go if you leave your name and address."

The boy sprang to his feet.

"Jack Wissel, Grammar School, and Ivy Cottage, Petsham."

"Right; hop it."

The red and yellow cap whisked out of the door and was presently flying through the streets at a pace worthy of a police tender in pursuit.

Upstairs in the Chief Clerk's office, Inspector Tallard was inspecting the grubby note. It was the duty of the Chief Clerk to open all letters addressed to the Chief Constable, unless they were marked 'Confidential' or addressed to him personally. This note showed no outward sign of being either confidential or personal, but the first glance at its contents caused Inspector Tallard to press his thumb firmly on the electric bell.

"Where's the boy who brought this?" he asked sharply when P.C. Leith re-appeared.

"Gone, sir."

"Fetch him back, sharp. Wait a minute, I'll telephone."

He picked up the receiver and put a call through to the Grammar School. In a minute he was speaking to the head-master.

"You've got a boy called Wissel, haven't you, Mr. Boulding? Yes, that's the lad; Jack Wissel.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He brought a note in here just now and the Chief Constable will want to see him about it. He'll be in any time now; could the boy come back and report? We shan't keep him long, I don't suppose. Thank you, Mr. Boulding."

Replacing the receiver, Inspector Tallard picked up the note and read it through again. Then he remembered that Leith was waiting.

"You said the boy came from Petsham, didn't you? Go down to Superintendent Venning and ask him if he can send his patrol car up the Petsham road to try and pick up that man Hinde we had an information about last night. He's got the description. Look sharp, and send Sergeant Pitt up to me."

A few seconds later the sergeant in charge of the general office appeared.

"Pitt, that fellow Hinde has sent a threatening letter to the Chief. Gave it to a boy on a bicycle somewhere this side of Petsham. Get on to all stations and let them know the man's about. Get . . . no, I'd better do him. Look sharp with it."

While Sergeant Pitt clattered downstairs, Inspector Tallard put a call through to Looseley and was soon speaking to Superintendent Ladger of the South-Eastern Division, in which Petsham lay.

"Inspector Tallard speaking, sir. Mr. Jason's away. That man Hinde we sent you an information about last night has been seen near Petsham. We want him rather badly. Could you send someone to Petsham? Ought to try the railway station there, I think, sir. Thank you, sir; if you will."

Again he hung up the receiver and was on the point of taking it off again when he heard heavy

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

steps coming up the stairs. The Chief Constable had arrived.

"This note's just come, sir. I thought you ought to see it at once."

Inspector Tallard stood beside his chief's chair and laid the grubby missive, in its envelope, on the blotting pad. Captain Scole picked it up, opened it, and sat up in his chair.

"Howd' you get hold of this?" he asked sharply.

"A boy brought it, sir. Said it had been given him by a man on the Petsham road. The boy was in a hurry to get to school, so I let him go, unfortunately, but he's on his way back now."

"You've read it, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

Again the Chief Constable ran his eye over the sheet of common paper. The words on it were by no means common :—

Sir, twenty years ago you got me a life sentence, it wasnt your forlt it wasnt the drop. You new the keeper was shot accidental but you swore it was deliberate. I done twenty years and I havnt forgot you for five minits in all those years. Next time the judge puts on the black cap for me it'll be for something I have done.

ALBERT HINDE.

P.S. I thort you might think this letter a kid so I let you have a look at me last night but not your cops.

The handwriting was shaky and sprawling but the letters were not ill-formed. It was much what might be expected from a man of elementary education who had done little or no writing for twenty years.

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"What does he mean by that last bit, sir?" enquired Inspector Tallard. "You didn't see him last night, did you?"

For a fraction of a second the Chief Constable hesitated, then:

"Yes, I did", he said, with a gruffness which suggested that he was rather ashamed of himself. "At least, it looks as if it must have been him. I ought to have rung you up, but the whole thing seemed so ridiculous—a lot of fuss about nothing. Anyway, I suppose we must do something about it now. This letter is a definite threat. We can charge him on that."

The Inspector opened his mouth as if to speak, but apparently thought better of it. The Chief Constable's assertion was arguable, but the occasion was not one for argument.

"What have you done? Warned the stations?"

"Yes, sir, and Superintendent Venning has sent a patrol car out to look for him. I was just going to ring up Greymouth when you came in. He was a Greymouth man originally and it seems a likely place for him to make for."

"Yes. Let the neighbouring counties know too. You needn't say anything about this letter; just say he's wanted for not reporting change of address. They'll guess there's something behind it."

Inspector Tallard smiled. The Chief didn't want his neighbours to think he'd got the wind up.

There was a knock at the door and P.C. Leith appeared, to report that the boy Wissel had returned.

"Send him up", said Captain Scole curtly.

Desperately assuring himself that he had done nothing wrong, Jack Wissel followed the policeman

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

upstairs and advanced a few feet into the lion's den. The sight of Inspector Tallard, whom he had seen playing cricket on a village green, slightly reassured him, but the harsh voice of the big man in the chair soon dispersed such reserves of courage as he had collected.

"Where did you meet this man?"

"I . . . he was . . . it was on the road, sir."

"I know that. Where? Stop twiddling your cap, boy; put it down."

The red and yellow head-gear, pride of Jack's heart, flopped down on to the floor.

"It was on the road here, sir, from Petsham, about a mile out, I should say. A mile from Petsham, I mean."

"That's better. Now, what was he like?"

"He was a Tough Guy, sir." The word of approval had restored Jack's confidence. The description was one he had already used to his schoolfellows. "He had a broken nose and a stubbly chin and his eyes . . . well, they were kind of fierce, sir."

"How tall was he?"

The boy thought a minute.

"I couldn't really say, sir, but he had a stoop. Heavy shoulders, he had—looked mighty strong."

"That's the fellow", said Captain Scole quickly. "Now you mention it, I remember he had got a stoop. Does that fit the description we got from Chassex, Tallard?"

"It does mention his having heavy shoulders, sir."

The Chief Constable thought for a minute.

"What was his voice like?" he asked, after a time.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Hoarse, sir; as if he'd got a cold."

Captain Scole nodded.

"Same chap, without a doubt", he said. "Well, we needn't keep you any longer, boy. Here, take this." He pulled half-a-crown from his pocket and flipped it accurately across the room. "Buy yourself a . . . whatever boys do buy themselves in these days—toy pistol probably. And if you see this chap again, keep your eye on him till a policeman turns up."

"I will, sir; thank you, sir."

Recovering his cap and clutching the silver piece from which nothing would ever induce him to part, Jack Wissel walked proudly from the room, firmly determined to become a policeman as soon as ever the tiresome business of education was behind him.

Captain Scole sat for some time in silence, stabbing at the blotting-pad with his paper-knife. Inspector Tallard turned to go, but the Chief Constable checked him.

"I expect this fellow has made himself scarce now", he said; "playing for effect, probably, but till he's traced I think we'd better take it a bit seriously. You get on with the tracing part; notify neighbouring counties and Scotland Yard—just say we want to know where he is—and ask Superintendent Venning to come and see me."

Superintendent Venning was the officer in charge of the Central Division, in which the County town of Brodbury was situated. He had recently been appointed Deputy-Chief Constable, but that office involved no extra responsibility or enhanced status except in the absence from duty of the Chief Constable. He was a man of a little under fifty, with a

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

thick, sturdy figure and a rugged face which was marred by eyes rather too close together. He was of the old-fashioned type of policeman, slow-thinking and stolid, but dogged and fearless to a degree—a bull-dog if ever there was one.

* His office was in the same building as that of the Headquarter Staff, connected by a passage on the ground floor. It was not long, therefore, before he was in possession of all the facts of the case. Evidently he regarded it seriously. He had been closely connected with the Hinde case, and remembered the man's violent character and his fury at the trap which had been laid for him by the police. He remembered, too, the look which Hinde had cast at the Chief Constable as he turned to leave the dock after being sentenced to death; it was a look which, if it had been directed at himself, he felt he would never have forgotten. So now he urged the Chief Constable to allow him to provide a proper bodyguard until the man who had uttered these threats was under observation, even though they were too veiled to allow of his being re-committed to prison—the only fit place for him in both Captain Scole's and Superintendent Venning's opinion.

Finally, it was arranged that for the time being the Chief Constable should do all his travelling in a police-car, with a constable in addition to the driver, that two constables should be constantly on guard at Horstings, Captain Scole's house, and that another should always be on duty either in the waiting-room at Headquarters or outside the front door. Except for a side door which was always locked, the only other entrance was through the charge-room

* See Frontispiece.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of the Brodbury Police-Station at the back of the Headquarter building, and that would in any case always be occupied by a policeman. More than this the Chief Constable would not agree to, though he consented to carry an automatic pistol himself. Although outwardly unmoved, Superintendent Venning thought that his chief was slightly uneasy —and for that he did not blame him.

In the meantime, Inspector Tallard had returned to the Chief Clerk's room and put a call through to the Greymouth Police. The big port of Greymouth, being a Borough of over 20,000 souls, had a Police Force of its own, much to the annoyance and inconvenience of the County Constabulary of Greyshire in which it was situated. Greymouth was a very likely objective for anyone who wanted to conceal himself, or even get out of the country, and Inspector Tallard was probably right in ringing up the Borough Police before getting on to the Greyshire County Constabulary. But his interview with the Chief Constable had taken an appreciable amount of time and it was 10.15 a.m. before the Greymouth police were in possession of the facts. As the port was only forty miles from Brodbury and less than that from the spot at which Hinde had been seen by the boy Wissel at 8.30 a.m., there was plenty of time for him to have got into the town and tucked himself away before the police started to look for him, provided that he had been lucky enough to get a lift in a car or lorry. On the other hand, if he had had to rely on a bicycle or his feet, he would now have some difficulty in getting into Greymouth unnoticed.

There remained the railway. Tallard reached for

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

his time-table, flicked over the pages, and discovered that a train had left Petsham for Greymouth at 9.27 a.m. If Superintendent Ladger had acted promptly on Tallard's call there would have been plenty of time for him to get a man to the station before that train went. If he had caught Hinde there he would have rung up long ago to report the fact, but it would be worth finding out whether that train had been watched. Again Tallard put a call through to Looseley and soon heard from the South-Eastern Divisional Superintendent that both Petsham and Looseley stations were being watched and that on the 9.27 from Petsham (Looseley 9.41) no one answering the description of Albert Hinde had travelled.

Now it was the turn of the Greyshire Constabulary. Inspector Tallard put his call through and in a short time was speaking to the Chief Clerk of that force. The latter listened without much apparent interest. When Tallard had finished speaking there was an appreciable pause ; then a bored voice said :

" Seen at 8.30 a.m., and it's now 10.45 ; you can't be in much of a hurry for him, Inspector ? "

Superintendent Blett knew that he was talking to one who could not well answer back. Inspector Tallard flushed hotly.

" Report didn't reach us till 9 a.m., sir. I've had a great many other calls to put through and a long interview with the Chief Constable."

It was a weak answer, even though a perfectly true one. Captain Scole's instructions as to not mentioning the threats made it impossible for Tallard to explain the affair properly. Superinten-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

dent Blett's supercilious: "Really?" down the telephone left him speechless. He realised that the Greyshire Constabulary were unlikely to bestir themselves unduly to find Hinde.

Having notified the other neighbouring Constabularies and also Scotland Yard, Inspector Tallard returned to the Chief Constable's room and asked the latter to reconsider his decision about notifying the full reason for Brodshire's desire to mark down Mr. Albert Hinde. The lack of this, Tallard reported, was handicapping him in his attempt to trace the man; Tallard instanced his failure to impress the Greyshire Constabulary with the urgency of the case (he did not quote Superintendent Blett's remarks) and pointed out that no Constabulary would be likely to send out special patrols in search of a man who was merely wanted for 'failure to notify a change of address'. The Chief Constable saw the point and reluctantly consented, on the understanding that the information was sent under cover and not over the public telephone.

Inspector Tallard at once returned to his room, wrote out a full report, accompanied by a further and more urgent request for help, and despatched copies at once by a constable on a motor bicycle to the Greymouth Borough Police and the Greyshire County Constabulary. The other neighbouring Constabularies and Scotland Yard could, he thought, have their copies in course of post.

It was by this time nearly mid-day and Tallard, feeling that he had done all that for the moment was possible, turned his attention to his other work. He had suggested re-calling Superintendent Jason

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

off leave, but the Chief Constable refused to interfere with his Chief Clerk's brief but well-earned holiday.

At 1 p.m. the patrol car which the Divisional Superintendent had sent out returned; Sergeant Vale reported that after hunting all the Brodshire roads in the neighbourhood of Petsham, he had gone over the border into Greyshire and followed the road right through to Greymouth without seeing a sign of Hinde. Superintendent Venning sent his sergeant up to the Headquarter office to report his lack of success.

A little later, Greymouth rang up to say that nothing had yet been seen of the wanted man, but that on receipt of the special report they were re-doubling their efforts to find him.

No further news came in until, shortly after three, a call came through from the Greyshire Constabulary. Inspector Tallard, with some misgiving, picked up the receiver and heard the unpleasant voice of Superintendent Blett at the other end of the line.

"That you, Inspector Tallard?" it asked. "If you're not too busy, perhaps you'd like to hear my report on this man, Albert Hinde? You would? Right. A man answering to your description of Hinde left Corsington by the 10.35 a.m. for London this morning. That was ten minutes before you rang me up, you'll remember, and an hour and three-quarters after he was seen near Petsham. Corsington is seventeen miles from Petsham, and the road isn't much better than a cross-country lane. He'd just have time to do it on a bicycle. If you want to find Hinde it might be worth your while to ring the Yard—if you're not too busy."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER III

HEADQUARTERS

"WHAT'S that constable doing down in the waiting-room?" was the first question that Superintendent Jason asked on his return to duty on Monday.* Inspector Tallard was waiting in the Chief Clerk's room to hand over to his superior officer, and he now detailed the events connected with Albert Hinde's appearance and disappearance.

"It's quite clear that he left by that 10.35 to London", he concluded. "I went over to Corsington myself that afternoon and saw the station-master and the staff. Three of them had noticed him; he's a striking-looking fellow, apparently, and there's not much traffic from there in the middle of the day. The Yard haven't been able to trace him in London, but King's Cross is a different place to Corsington; it would be easy for him to slip through in the crowd."

Superintendent Jason had listened to the story in silence. He had even opened and glanced through some of his letters—a trick that had annoyed Tallard before now, when he was reporting to him. Now he remained silent for a minute, apparently engrossed in a report from the South-Eastern Division on Foot and Mouth Disease.

"You all appear to have got a bit rattled", he said presently, turning over a page.

Inspector Tallard flushed but made no answer. Superintendent Jason looked up.

* 13th November, 1933.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"This Adelphi melodrama touch—sentries all over the place—was that your bright idea?"

"No, sir; Superintendent Venning's in charge of the case so far as protection's concerned. The Chief told me to see to the tracing of Hinde."

"And you've traced him to London, and London has lost him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good job, too. What would you have done with him if you had caught him? Charged him with loitering?"

"No, sir; 'threatening to kill', I expect . . . at least, that's what I gathered the Chief Constable had in mind."

"I thought you said he didn't want people to know about these threats?"

"No, sir, he didn't seem to", replied Tallard, doggedly, "but when I showed him the letter he said: 'this is a threat; we can charge him on this'."

"Let's see it, then", said Superintendent Jason, curtly.

Inspector Tallard unlocked a drawer and, taking out the grubby note brought by Jack Wissel, handed it to the Chief Clerk. The latter read it carefully, then put it back in the drawer and slipped the bunch of keys into his own pocket.

"Nothing in that", he said shortly. "Better get on with your work now, Tallard."

With this curt dismissal, Inspector Tallard returned to his own room on the ground floor. His normal duties were of a rather dull, routine character, and it was only during the absence of Superintendent Jason that he got a chance of acting on his own

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

initiative in matters of importance. It had been a surprise to his friends when, as a sergeant, he had been transferred to the Headquarter Staff, but he had laughingly told them that he had applied for the job, his experience in France having taught him that it was there that promotion would most rapidly and comfortably be achieved.

Superintendent Jason's chilling reception of his report did not altogether surprise Tallard. The Chief Clerk was a clever, capable officer, but he had a sarcastic manner and was too fond of snubbing his subordinates, and even his equals, to be much liked in the force. He was young for his appointment—barely forty-three. Dark-haired and clean-shaven, with quick, intelligent eyes, he was more slightly built than the average of the force, though he held himself well. Unlike many of his comrades, he had not been in the army; indeed he affected to look down upon the ex-Service men as being less quick-witted than their civilian fellows. This attitude, again, did not add to his popularity. He had a wife no less clever and ambitious than himself; Mrs. Jason was currently believed to cherish a hope of even higher promotion for her husband, though no Chief Constable of Brodshire had hitherto risen from the ranks.

His short holiday had caused a good deal of work to accumulate for the Chief Clerk, Inspector Tallard having left a good many matters of no urgency for his superior's decision. For four hours Superintendent Jason worked hard, only going to the Chief Constable's room to report his return, and thank his Chief for the leave. He made no reference to the Albert Hinde case and was amused to notice that

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the Chief Constable did not mention it either—probably rather ashamed at all the fuss that has been made about it, thought Jason.

At lunch-time he looked into Superintendent Venning's room at the back of the Headquarter office. The Deputy Chief Constable was one of the stolid ex-soldiers whom Jason liked to tease. Venning had indeed commanded a battalion during the last hectic months of the war, and was deeply admired and trusted by his Chief, a fact which probably did not add to Superintendent Jason's love of him.

"Good-morning, Venning", said the Chief Clerk, sitting on a corner of the table and swinging a leg. "You seem to have been enjoying a bit of melodrama while I've been away."

Superintendent Venning looked slowly over his visitor, including the swinging leg.

"Good morning, Jason. I was very sorry to hear about your sister's illness."

The Chief Clerk had the grace to flush slightly, but he was not going to be put off his amusement.

"Thanks: she's better. How long are we going to be surrounded by your cordon?"

"Till you've found Albert Hinde and he's put away. I hope you won't be long about it; I've got plenty of work for my men without this."

So far, Jason felt that the *riposte* had been at least as effective as the attack.

"Surely you don't take this fellow Hinde seriously?" he asked. "These old lags never do anything to risk their skins. He's only behaving like a small boy—putting his tongue out and running away."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Superintendent Venning looked at his clock and pulled out a pipe.

"D'you think so?" he asked. "I remember Hinde pretty well. He didn't strike me that way. You don't remember the trial, of course—before your time."

Jason laughed.

"You've missed there, Venning", he said. "I've got twenty-five years' service, though my teeth aren't falling out. I didn't waste my time playing in a red coat before I started work."

Superintendent Venning grunted, and pushed back in his chair.

"Nor in a khaki one either, so far as I remember", he said heavily. "Lunch time; see you later, perhaps."

He rose to his feet, and picking up his cap, strode through the charge-room and out into the yard. He was angry. Jason's reference to his age had pricked him. But his heavier weapon had been no less effective. The Chief Clerk sat on where Venning had left him, his leg motionless now, and his face white.

* * * * *

As soon as he had finished his mid-day meal, Superintendent Venning made his way to the Headquarter Office and asked if the Chief Constable would see him. He knew that Captain Scole was going to be out for a large part of the afternoon and he wanted to catch him before he went. He was not at all sure how the suggestion he was going to make would be received and it was with some nervousness that he entered the Chief Constable's room.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Ah, it's you, Venning. Sit down. I've got a letter I must finish, if you don't mind. Got to be over at Blything at three, but I needn't start for another quarter of an hour."

The Chief Constable's fountain pen flashed quickly over the paper. Superintendent Venning watched it with fascinated interest. He himself was a slow writer and an inky one; this ink seemed to dry as it flowed from the pen. As if in confirmation of the phenomenon, Captain Scole folded his letter without blotting it, pushed it into an envelope, and fastened it up with a bang.

"That'll keep him quiet for a bit. Now, Venning; anything troubling you?"

"Yes, sir." Superintendent Venning never beat about the bush. "I want to ask you to take up your quarters here for a bit."

"Take up my . . .? Captain Scole stared. "Do you mean live here?"

"Yes, sir—till we've got our hands on this fellow Hinde. You know, sir, two men at Horstings aren't enough to protect you properly—not at night—and you won't let me send any more."

"Can't spare them," said Captain Scole grimly. "We want another twenty men as it is, to do our ordinary work properly, but these County Council members start a howl if I so much as ask for five. As for protecting their own Chief Constable . . . well, I don't know what some of them would say if they knew about your two men."

Captain Scole spoke bitterly. It was a long-standing grievance and one for which Superintendent Venning felt the utmost sympathy.

"All the more reason for doing as I ask, sir. Do

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

away with the two men—one of them at any rate—if we had you here, and make sure at the same time."

"What's your idea? That we should come and live in a hotel in the town?"

"No, sir. If you'll excuse me, sir; it's a liberty, I know, but I thought that perhaps if Mrs. Scole and Miss Scole could go and stay with friends, perhaps, or relations, for a while—it can't be for long—then you could come and live right in the quarters."

Superintendent Venning eyed his chief nervously.

"I wondered, sir . . . well, of course, we could make you up a bedroom in the store room; it's a big room, not too full. But what I'd really like, sir, if you'll consider it, would be for you to have the spare-room in my quarters, sir. Mrs. Venning would be very proud to look after you, sir; she's a good cook and . . . well, I'd have you under my own eye then, sir, and I'd *know* you were all right."

Captain Scoles' hard grey eyes softened. He leant forward and patted his companion on the arm.

"Thank you, Venning; I appreciate that," he said. "I'll talk it over with my wife. Now I must be going."

He rose to his feet.

"I gather you're taking this seriously," he said. "You think Hinde means business?"

"I don't know about that, sir; maybe he doesn't, but I'm taking no chances. Think what fools we should look if we had our own Chief done in under our eyes—and after we'd been warned, too!"

Captain Scole burst into a loud laugh.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"So that's what's worrying you," he exclaimed.

* * * * *

The Chief Constable returned at twenty minutes past four and, putting his head in at Superintendent Jason's door, told him to bring along the letters for the evening post. The task of signing them was partly automatic, the Chief Clerk keeping up a running commentary of explanation while he blotted the sheets as his Chief signed them. Some of the talk was not even about the papers before them, but about events of the afternoon.

"No more news in about this fellow Hinde?"

"Nothing, sir, except that Greymouth rang through to say they were pretty sure he wasn't there."

"You know of Superintendent Venning's suggestion?"

"Suggestion, sir?"

"That I should come and live at Headquarters till you've put your hands on him."

Superintendent Jason raised his eyebrows.

"Really, sir?"

The Chief Constable frowned, quick to suspect criticism.

"You think I'm making an unnecessary fuss about my own skin?"

"Oh, no, sir; I don't think that at all. I understood that it was Superintendent's suggestion."

"So it is. You don't think much of it?"

"I expect I should suggest just the same myself if the responsibility of protecting you was mine, sir," replied the Chief Clerk tactfully.

Captain Scole grunted.

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Anything more?"

"I understand that Inspector Tallard has the motor-patrol schedules ready for your inspection, sir."

"Right; tell him to bring them up. I shall leave as soon as I've done that; I want to get home early to-night."

One of Inspector Tallard's special duties was the preparation of schedules, routes, etc., for the motor-patrols, and reports on their work. On this subject he had direct access to the Chief Constable—a form of decentralisation strongly disliked by Superintendent Jason. This branch of police-work was of special interest to the Chief Constable, who found that he could get motor-cars out of the Standing Joint Committee more easily than he could get men, and who looked to mechanization to solve some of his man-power problems. He had allotted the staff-work of the business to Inspector Tallard, thinking that he would get more enthusiastic support from the subordinate than from the already over-burdened Chief Clerk. The idea was sound enough—but Superintendent Jason didn't like it.

Every Monday Inspector Tallard prepared schedules of the proposed work of each of the patrols during the week, varying the routes and times and arranging points of touch and call. By this means, while Headquarters knew exactly—or almost exactly—where every patrol-car would be at any fixed time, the public—the criminal public—were prevented from guessing, by observation of past patrol movements, where the danger from this source would come. Reports on the work of the past week were sent in to Headquarters on Monday mornings, and these were used in compiling the new week's

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

schedule. For the purpose of this work, the week ran from Tuesday to Tuesday, so as to avoid having any sort of ' break ' during the criminally-important week-end.

These reports and schedules always interested the Chief Constable. He had indicated to Superintendent Jason that he was in a hurry, but it was a good twenty minutes before Inspector Tallard left his office and put his head in at Superintendent Jason's door to say that the Chief Constable wanted to know if there were any more letters for him to sign.

" Nothing," said Superintendent Jason. " He told me he was in a hurry."

" I think he is, sir. He's just going."

" Right. I've nothing more. Look here, Tallard, did you come to my door just now ? "

" Your door, sir ? "

Inspector's Tallard's wooden expression and habit of repeating questions always irritated the Chief Clerk.

" My door ; yes. Did you open it and not come in ? "

" No, sir. When do you mean ? "

" About five minutes ago. I felt a draught on my neck and looked up and my door was shutting. It had been shut before ; somebody must have opened it and shut it again."

Inspector Tallard shook his head.

" 'Twasn't me, sir. May have been one of the constables. Or it may have been the wind."

" Wind doesn't shut a door quietly ", replied Jason irritably.

Inspector Tallard looked anxiously at his senior.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"You're not getting worried about this man Hinde, are you, sir?"

"Oh, be damned to Hinde; I don't believe he exists. Look here, I've got work to do even if you haven't."

The injustice of this remark did not seem to worry Inspector Tallard. Outside the Chief Clerk's door a broad grin spread over his face. One can get away with a good deal of leg-pulling if one cultivates a stupid expression. He stumped down the stairs and re-entered his own office. For five minutes he worked at his schedules, making alterations suggested by the Chief Constable. Then he pressed his finger five times on a bell beside him. A few seconds later the door opened and one of the police-constables from the general office appeared.

"Take these schedules and type six copies of each, Hookworthy. Look through them and see if they're clear."

The tall, clean-shaven young constable ran his eye rapidly over the sheets, shifting them from hand to hand.

"Right, sir. You want them at once, I expect."

"Yes, please."

Hookworthy turned on his rubber heel and left the room, shutting the door quietly behind him. In the waiting-room he paused for a moment to speak to a constable who had just come in from the street.

"Posted the letters, Charlie?"

The new-comer nodded and shut the front-door with a bang. The ramshackle old building shook, and immediately after it was shaken again by the muffled crash of a shot, followed immediately by another.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER IV

A VACANCY OCCURS

FOR a second the two young constables stared at each other; then the doors on each side of the waiting-room were flung open and Inspector Tallard dashed out from his room, while Sergeant Pitt and P.C. Leith came tumbling out of the general office.

"Where was that?" "What the devil . . .?" "That's a shot!"

Everybody was speaking at once, excited and nervous. Inspector Tallard was the first to pull himself together.

"Upstairs, I'm sure", he exclaimed, and ran quickly up the staircase, followed by the others.

On the landing he checked. Superintendent Jason was standing at the open door of the Chief Constable's room, staring into it. He was leaning with his hand on one of the jambs, and the expression on his pale face was enough to show that something startling had occurred. Inspector Tallard hurried forward and stared over his senior's shoulder. The Chief Constable was sitting at his desk, his body slumped down in his chair, his head resting on the blotting pad. His face was turned towards the door and the small black hole in the forehead, together with the acrid smell of gunpowder which filled the room, left no doubt in the police officers' minds as to the tragedy that they were looking at.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Is he dead?" whispered an awe-struck constable.

"Better have a look at him, sir, hadn't we?" urged Inspector Tallard.

Superintendent Jason, whose war-work had not accustomed him to the sight of death, looked as if he was going to faint, but with an effort he pulled himself together.

"Yes. Yes, I suppose we'd better", he said. "Better send for a doctor, Tallard; no, you do that, Sergeant Pitt. Come in with me, Tallard."

The sound of heavy footsteps stumbling up the stairs checked them. Superintendent Venning appeared, red and panting.

"What's this? What's happened?" he panted.

"Chief Constable's shot, sir," said Inspector Tallard, seeing that Superintendent Jason was still too dazed to answer.

Superintendent Venning joined them in the doorway, drawing in his breath with a hiss as he saw the dead body of his chief.

"Man must be in the building, sir, or on the roof; shall I search for him?" asked Tallard.

Superintendent Venning gave him a sharp look.

"What man?"

"Hinde, sir. That is . . . if you think it's him."

Venning looked back into the room.

"My God", he groaned, the full force of what had happened seeming to strike him. It had been Superintendent Venning's business to guard his Chief . . . and he had failed. Failed, in spite of warning and with all the power of the police force at his command.

"Yes, you search the inside", he said; then,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

turning to a Sergeant who had accompanied him from the Police Station : " Bannister, get up on to the roof ; take these constables with you."

Another uniformed Inspector came bounding up the stairs.

" Mr. Parry ", barked Venning, " get a cordon round the building in case this fellow comes down off the roof, though it's hardly likely. Then get every man you can find out into the town and hunt this fellow down—you all know what he looks like. Get the cars and ' combinations ' out and all the bicycles and search every road. Then warn all stations and get their patrols out. Get a move on."

Inspector Parry hurried away. Tallard and Bannister, with the Headquarter constables, had already disappeared into the store-room, which gave access to the roof. Superintendent Venning turned to the Chief Clerk.

" For God's sake, don't stand there like a stuck pig, Jason ", he exclaimed irritably. " Get on to the Yard and ask them to get particulars into the Metropolitan Police Information, with photographs if possible. If they've only got the ones taken on admission it should be made clear that they were taken twenty years ago. We must have copies of the photographs for our own informations. And ask them to get on to the B.B.C. and see if they can get a description out on the First News."

He looked at his watch.

" Hell ! it's nearly six. Ask the Yard to do that first and do for heaven's sake *stir yourself !* "

Superintendent Jason flushed a deep red. It was a long time since he had been spoken to like this,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and by a fellow Superintendent! He opened his mouth to snarl back . . . then he remembered . . . Venning was acting-Chief Constable now.

He turned sharply on his heel.

Superintendent Venning turned to enter the Chief Constable's room but his eye was caught by Inspector Tallard coming along the passage, followed by P.C. Hookworthy.

"Well?" he asked.

"He's not in the store-room, sir, and both the windows are shut. Sergeant Bannister's gone up on to the roof, but Hinde could hardly have got there, because the ladder was leaning against the far wall. He's not in the cupboards in the passage, either."

"Beg pardon, sir; that window's open."

The two seniors turned to stare at P.C. Hookworthy, who was pointing to the window on the landing facing the stairs.

"So it is. What of it? Think he got out that way?"

"More likely came in, sir. May have got out through the Chief's window." Hookworthy pointed into the room. "Mr. Jason must have seen him if he'd come out on to the passage."

"Oh? Where was he?"

"Standing at this door when we came up, sir, and that wasn't many seconds after the shot."

Superintendent Venning crossed the passage to the Chief Clerk's room. Jason was sitting at his desk, impatiently clutching a silent telephone instrument.

"Where were you when the shot was fired, Mr. Jason?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

" In here, sir. I went straight out into the passage and opened the Chief Constable's door. There wasn't a sign of anyone."

" How long did that take you ? Could the man have got out of the passage window, or the Chief's window ? "

" Hardly the passage, sir. I might have been five seconds recovering from the surprise and getting out into the passage—hardly more. He might possibly have got out of the Chief's window."

The telephone buzzed.

" The Yard, sir. Hullo. Brodshire Constabulary. Can I . . . ? "

Superintendent Venning turned back into the passage, where Inspector Tallard was still waiting.

" Get on with it, then, Tallard. He's not in there. Try downstairs. By the way, anyone called Dr. Pugh ? "

" Mr. Jason told Sergeant Pitt to, sir, just before you came up."

" Right ; then get on with your search."

Followed by Hookworthy, Inspector Tallard ran down the stairs. At the bottom he stopped to try the side-door which gave on to a small courtyard between the wings of the building.

" Locked ", he said, " —and bolted. He couldn't have got out that way."

" Couldn't have anyway, sir ", commented Hookworthy. " Tupple and I were standing at the foot of the stairs when the shot was fired."

Inspector Tallard stared at him.

" Were you ? " he said. " You didn't see anything . . . upstairs ? "

" Nothing, sir ; I don't think we looked upstairs ;

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

we stared at each other. Then you ran up and we followed you."

Tallard nodded.

" Anyway you can't see much, because the stairs turn and the balustrade hides most of the passage. He must have gone out of the window ; he's not on that floor and he couldn't have got down to this with you standing here. It isn't much of a drop. We must search down here as a matter of form."

At this moment the Divisional Surgeon arrived in response to Sergeant Pitt's telephone call. Inspector Tallard took him straight up to the Chief Constable's room, where they found Superintendent Venning standing at the window, staring out into the gathering darkness. As he turned to greet the Police Surgeon, Dr. Pugh saw that his face looked haggard and old.

" Oh, there you are, doctor. I've not moved him. He's dead, of course."

" My dear Superintendent ; this is a terrible thing, a terrible thing ! "

Dr. Pugh was a small, tubby man, with a red, cheerful countenance that just now he was trying to screw into a semblance of gloom. He himself had felt no particular affection for Captain Scole, but he believed that Superintendent Venning had been devoted to him.

His preliminary examination was soon over.

" Instantaneous death ", he said. " Any idea how it happened ? "

Superintendent Venning hesitated, then asked :

" Can you tell how far the shot came from, doctor ? "

Dr. Pugh again examined the wound.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"There's no powder burning", he said, "but there is a smell of powder on the flesh. Got a magnifying glass and a torch?"

A glass was lying on the Chief Constable's desk; Venning produced a small spotlight torch from his pocket. With the help of these the police surgeon closely scrutinized the dead man's forehead.

"Yes; there are minute particles of powder in the flesh", he said. "The pistol can't have been far away—say two to three feet, probably not more than two. Nor, I should say, closer than one foot."

The Superintendent nodded.

"And fired from straight in front?"

"Seems to have been. I can tell you that for certain after the P.M. As you see, the bullet is still in the brain."

"Thank you, doctor. You asked how this happened. You won't let this go any further, of course. We think he was killed by a man called Hinde, who's just been released from Fieldhurst and has been uttering threats to the Captain. He was sentenced to death for the murder of a keeper in '13—sentence commuted. I don't know whether you remember the case, sir?"

Dr. Pugh's blue eyes had opened wide.

"Indeed I do", he said. "A very tragic case. I always thought . . ."

He checked himself, throwing a quick glance at the Superintendent.

"However, I mustn't stop here taking up your time. You'll let me have the body up at the hospital mortuary?"

"In half an hour, sir. But please don't go yet. There's another point I'd like your opinion about."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He walked across to the window which faced the writing-table, and pointed to a hole in the plaster just above the frame.

"There were two shots", he said; "one that killed the Captain and—apparently—this. I haven't got the bullet out yet, but it looks as if the Captain had fired it. As you see, he's got an automatic in his hand. He always kept one in his drawer, and after the threats I persuaded him to keep it on his desk under some papers. It looks as if he'd got his shot off first—and missed. But it's very high, even for a man sitting down. Hinde was a bit above your height, doctor; would you mind standing the other side of the table, about where you think the shot was fired from?"

Dr. Pugh did so, and Venning bent down to the position he judged Captain Scole would have been in when sitting upright.

"The bullet mark's well above your head, doctor. You wouldn't think he could miss at that range."

He paused in thought.

"Of course", he added with a smile, "not one army officer in twenty could ever hit a haystack with a revolver. And when they missed, they missed high. But this automatic hadn't got anything like the kick of the old Service revolver, and in any case you'd think that a man doing police work in India would learn how to protect himself."

"There's another explanation", said Dr. Pugh. "He may *not* have got his shot in first. That may have been fired after death—muscular contraction as the bullet struck him. It would be liable to jerk his arm up."

Superintendent Venning considered the point.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"That's an interesting suggestion, doctor. I'll remember it."

Dr. Pugh's curiosity was now thoroughly aroused.

"How did the man get in here, though?" he asked. "I suppose you were on the look-out for him?"

Superintendent Venning flushed.

"We were, sir", he said shortly. "At present we think he must have come off the roof, got in by the landing window, and walked in at the door. We hadn't got a man there—the Chief wouldn't have it—only downstairs or outside the front door."

"But if he came in through the door, Captain Scole would hardly have let him walk right across the room to the front of his table? You don't think . . .?" the police-surgeon's eyes glistened with excitement. "You don't think he was trying to get in at *this* window and Scole shot at him and missed, and was shot before he could fire again?"

"I thought you said not more than three feet, sir?"

Dr. Pugh's face fell.

"So I did. So I did. I must look up that point. I may be mistaken. I'll let you know."

He bustled out, giving a word of cheerful greeting to a uniformed police-inspector whom he passed at the top of the stairs. The interest of the problem had already banished the shadow of gloom from Dr. Pugh's mercurial spirits.

The Inspector knocked at the Chief Constable's door and went in.

"Ah, there you are, Parry. Any signs of him?"

The Inspector shook his head.

"Not so far, sir. He's not on the roof, and it's too

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

dark to see if there are any marks of his being up there. I didn't let them scramble about too much for fear of confusing things."

"Quite right."

"None of the motor patrols are in yet. He's not been seen in the town."

Venning frowned.

"You'd think somebody'ld spot a chap like that . . . in a hurry. He's fairly distinctive—heavy shoulders, stoop, criminal type. We must get bills round the town as quick as possible and meantime pass word round."

"I've done that, sir. There's not many people in Brodbury now don't know who we're looking for and what he's like. He's bound to be seen, sir."

Inspector Parry, of the Central Division, was a phlegmatic, unimaginative west-countryman. His fresh complexion made him look younger than he was, but Superintendent Venning knew that he was absolutely reliable and a cool hand in times of trouble.

"Well, you must keep on hunting for him, Parry. I must leave the details in your hands. By the way, you're in charge of the division for the time being. I'm acting-Chief Constable now and I shan't have t me for both—not with this job on my hands. I know things'll be all right with you."

Parry flushed with pride.

"Do my best, sir", he muttered. "Sad business, this."

He glanced calmly at the Chief Constable's body. It seemed strange that that strong, virile personality should lie quietly there, as if asleep in his chair, oblivious to all that was going on around him.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Superintendent Venning pulled himself together with a jerk.

"I must get ahead", he said. "Before you go, Parry, give me a hand with this bullet."

He pointed to the mark above the window.

"I want to fix the exact line that bullet went in at", he said. "I can't get at it without the plaster crumbling, but if you'll give me a hand I think we can fix it."

With the help of two drawing pins, a thin piece of string was fixed to cut horizontally across the centre of the hole in the plaster. A second piece was then fixed vertically, the bisecting points of the two strings thus marking the approximate point of entry. The hole was then enlarged till the bullet was found, almost flattened out against the brick-work. A deep scar in the brick showed the exact spot at which the bullet had struck it, slightly above the point of intersection of the two pieces of string. This did not satisfy Superintendent Venning, however; taking a longer piece of string he held one end of it on the brick-scar while Inspector Parry held the other end just above the dead man's hand. The string, tautened on that line, touched the point of intersection of the other pieces.

"That's the line all right. He was sitting there when he fired it."

Parry looked at his chief with mild interest.

"Did you doubt it, sir?" he asked.

Venning did not answer; he was examining the flattened bullet.

"Difficult to make much of that", he muttered.

About a quarter of an inch of the base still retained its shape. Venning carefully fitted this into the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

mouth of the dead man's pistol, twisting it slightly to follow the rifling. Parry watched with smiling admiration.

" You're not taking any chances, Super ", he said.

" Chances ! "

Venning looked up, a flash of anger in his close-set eyes.

" I've had my Chief shot dead under my nose—after I've set out to protect him ! I can't undo that, but I'm going to get the man that did it. No, I'm not taking any chances ! "

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER V

FIVE PER CENT

As Inspector Parry turned to leave the room, he felt something hard crumple under his heels. Stooping, he picked up a crumpled brass cartridge-case.

" One of the shells, sir ", he said, handing it to the Superintendent.

Venning looked at it blankly.

" I'd forgotten those ", he said. " There should be another one . . . unless . . ."

He paused, looking at the open window.

" Just exactly where was that ? " he asked.

" Under my heel, sir ; here."

" Between the writing table and the window, rather towards the door. H'm. These pistols eject to the right, so that was the one that shot him. Wish you hadn't trod on it. Never mind ; I expect we can make out what calibre it is. The other should be this side ; have a look for it."

Parry hunted about on the carpet to the right of the Chief Constable's chair and soon picked up a second case. Examining it, he said :

" Looks much the same as the other, sir."

" What's that ? "

Venning took the case and compared it with the first. Without further comment, he slipped them into his pocket.

There was a knock at the door and Superintendent Jason appeared.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Can I have a word with you, sir, please?"

He glanced at Inspector Parry and Superintendent Venning dismissed the latter to his own duties, telling him to arrange for an ambulance to take the body up to the mortuary.

"In the excitement of the moment, sir, I forgot to tell you something that may have a bearing on . . . this."

Venning noticed with approval that the Chief Clerk was addressing him as acting-Chief Constable and not as a fellow Superintendent. Under the circumstances, it would probably be best to maintain that formal note.

"What was that, Mr. Jason?" he asked.

"Some time—about half an hour, I should think—before the shots were fired, the door of my room was quietly opened and quietly shut. No one came in. I asked Inspector Tallard whether he had done it, but he said not. I don't know who else it can have been . . . unless . . ."

"Unless it was Hinde, you mean?"

"That did occur to me, sir."

"When was it you asked Tallard about it? After the murder?"

"No, sir. When he came to ask if there were any more letters for the Chief Constable to sign. That would have been about five or ten minutes after the door opening and about the same time before the shots."

"We'd better get these times exact", said Venning. "Let's have Mr. Tallard up."

Superintendent Jason pressed his finger twice on the Chief Constable's bell and in a short time Inspector Tallard appeared.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Shut the door, Inspector", said Superintendent Venning. "We're trying to fix times. To begin with, Mr. Jason tells me that he asked whether it was you who opened and shut his door this afternoon without coming in. I understand you said it was not."

"That's so, sir; and I've since asked Sergeant Pitt and the constables in the general office and the constable on guard outside the front door, and they all say it wasn't them."

"That's worth knowing. Now what time was it when you *did* come into Mr. Jason's room? When he asked you that question, I mean."

"Just after five, sir", responded Tallard promptly. "I'd been doing the car-patrol schedules with the Chief Constable and I kept my eye on the clock because I knew he wanted to get away. I went straight across to Mr. Jason's room. I should put that at 5.5 p.m., sir."

"Good. And your door was opened, Mr. Jason, five or ten minutes before that?"

"I should say so, sir."

"You said five minutes at the time, I remember, sir", remarked Inspector Tallard.

"Did I? Well, perhaps it was. Say between 4.55 and 5 p.m., sir", said Superintendent Jason, with a slight note of sarcasm in his voice. Venning took no notice of it.

"That would be when you were with the Chief Constable, then, Inspector. And you saw nothing unusual either when you went across to Mr. Jason's room or when you left it? And what did you do then?"

"Went straight downstairs, sir, revised my

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

schedules, and gave P.C. Hookworthy orders about typing them. He had just left me when the shots were fired."

"And what time would that be?"

Inspector Tallard pondered.

"Can't tell you exactly, sir", he said. "I suppose I was five minutes over my notes and five minutes talking to Hookworthy. Say a quarter past five, sir."

"Nearer half-past", said Jason. "You were five or ten minutes in here talking to me. I remember telling you I had some work to do."

Inspector Tallard flushed, but held his tongue.

"You've no other reason for saying half-past, Mr. Jason?" asked Superintendent Venning. "Didn't notice the clock or anything?"

"Can't say I did, sir."

"Then we must try further afield. Get your office staff up one at a time please, Mr. Jason."

By this means the time of the shots was fixed fairly exactly at 5.20 p.m., the most definite evidence coming from P.C. Tupple, who had been out to post the letters and had looked at the clock in the square to make sure he was in time. The shots had been fired directly he got back, as he was talking to P.C. Hookworthy in the waiting-room.

By the same process the problem of the window on the landing was probed. It seemed fairly certain that the window had been shut all the morning and that no one on the Headquarter staff had opened it—unless it was the Chief Constable himself, which seemed improbable.

The problem of Superintendent Jason's door remained a mystery. The general, rather flippant,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

opinion of the juniors in the office was that 'the cat' had done it.

By the time these enquiries were over it was past eight o'clock and the body had been removed. Realising that, though he had a lot of work still to do, he would do it better after some supper, Superintendent Venning was on the point of locking up when it occurred to him that the news of the Chief Constable's death ought not to reach the Chairman of the Standing Joint Committee in the morning paper. Accordingly he rang up Sir George Playhurst and broke the news to him as gently as possible, excusing himself for not doing so in person by the distance (thirty miles) to Culton and the pressure of work. The old man was evidently deeply shocked at the tragedy, but on learning that the acting-Chief Constable was not at the moment in need of his presence, promised to come in to Headquarters in the morning.

Venning appreciated the consideration. Many men would have rushed in at once and insisted on hearing all about it and generally wasting the acting-Chief's valuable time—even if they did not actually summon him out to their own home. But Sir George, though slow-thinking, was eminently sound.

Returning to his house for a hurried meal, the stout and motherly Mrs. Venning laid a plate of soup before him with one hand and hurled a bomb with the other.

"Poor gentleman", she said, "and you asking him only this morning, Willie, to come and stop with us. I can't hardly believe it. But there; it's 'poor lady' I should be saying. How did Mrs. Scole take the news?"

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

'Willie' clapped his hands to his head with a smothered curse.

"Lord, what'll I be forgetting next?" he groaned. "I'm not fit for this job, mother. There seem a hundred things all to do at once—and I forget the first of them. Here, I must be off at once."

He pushed back his chair, but Mrs. Venning held him firmly in his seat.

"Ten minutes won't make any difference", she said, "and you need your food. I'm sure it's no blame to you, dear—with all you have to do. Why shouldn't that doctor go and tell her?"

"No, it's my job, mother", returned Venning, doggedly. "It was my job to guard him—and I failed. It's my job to break the news to Mrs. Scole; I'm late, but I'll do it—if it isn't done already. Then it'll be my job to find his murderer, and I'm damned if I'll fail there."

He struck the table with his fist, making the soup jump dangerously in its plate.

"You've no call to swear, dear", remonstrated Mrs. Venning mildly. "Eat it up, now, there's a good boy."

Thus admonished, Superintendent Venning ate his supper and, sending for his car, drove out to 'Horstings' and enquired for Mrs. Scole. A word with the maid re-assured him; it was evident that the news had not preceded him. Sending in his name, he waited uncomfortably in the hall, feeling guilty and ashamed at his remissness.

He had not long to wait. A small, faded woman came hurrying down the stairs, followed by a tall girl of about twenty-four, handsome but dowdy and listless.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Is it my husband? What is it, Superintendent? We expected him back long ago. He is often late, but not for dinner as a rule. We would have telephoned, but he doesn't like our worrying the office."

In her nervous disquiet Mrs. Scole rattled on, not waiting for an answer to her questions. There was an appealing note in her thin voice that touched Venning's heart; he felt more than ever a brute.

"I'm very sorry, madam", he said, "but I have bad news for you. Captain Scole has met with a serious accident."

"Oh!"

The little stifled cry was all that Mrs. Scole seemed capable of uttering. She stared at the Superintendent beseechingly.

"Is he dead?"

The question came from her daughter. Venning looked at her and realised with a shock, that there was less of distress than excitement in her voice and expression. Her dull eyes had a gleam in them that was not due to tears.

Venning nodded.

"Yes, miss, I regret to say that he is." He paused, at a loss to know what more to say. "I . . . we . . . the force would like to offer you our most sincere sympathy, madam. Captain Scole was a good friend to all of us and we shall miss him deeply."

Mrs. Scole sank slowly into a chair and stared straight in front of her with dry eyes and trembling lips. Her daughter sank on her knees beside her and put one arm round her mother's shoulders.

"I'll wait in the back in case you want me, miss",

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

muttered Venning, moving to the green baize door which he knew led to the servants' quarters. Miss Scole thanked him with a nod.

For ten minutes the Superintendent was kept busy answering the eager questions of cook and house-parlourmaid. He took the opportunity of learning a little more about the family than he already knew. The servants were loyal enough, but Venning had no difficulty in guessing that no love had been lost between father and daughter, the latter being passionately devoted to her mother, whose life was none too easy. 'The Captain' had kept his women-folk pretty close in the matter of money, and Miss Kitty, besides resenting the poverty of her own wardrobe, was always struggling with her father for opportunities of greater happiness for her mother. Through it all, Mrs. Scole had striven feebly to keep the peace, grateful to her daughter, but never joining her in open revolt.

After a time the Superintendent was summoned to give a fuller account to Mrs. and Miss Scole of what had occurred. As gently as possible he broke it to them that Captain Scole had been shot, apparently murdered, and as soon as they had recovered from this further shock, he asked leave to make a formal examination of the Chief Constable's papers, explaining that he did not expect to find anything of significance but that such an examination was a matter of routine.

'Horstings' was a large, old-fashioned house, with more reception rooms than could conveniently be managed by the staff which the Scoles were able to keep. The 'boudoir'—relic of Victorian days—was therefore closed, used only as a lumber room,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

but Captain Scole had a fine oak-panelled study looking on the garden. The thick red carpet was probably the only post-Victorian one in the house, and a modern roll-top desk enabled the Chief Constable to keep his confidential papers from prying eyes without the labour of tidying up every time he left the room. Superintendent Venning had brought the dead man's keys, and it was to this desk that he first turned his attention.

On the writing part of the desk, under the roll-top, there was nothing of special interest. A typed paper with the official description of Albert Hinde, together with some notes in the Chief Constable's handwriting on the steps to be taken for finding him, indicated that that matter had not been forgotten when Captain Scole left his official atmosphere. A drawer-full of private letters, of no apparent interest; another of pass-books, cheque book, etc., of which a glance showed that there was no apparent financial stress; pigeon-holes with neatly docketed bills and receipts; all these were cursorily examined without doing more than confirm Superintendent Venning's expectations.

In the locked drawers below the writing table, Venning found a file of papers which sorely tempted him to linger—papers concerning police matters in the county so confidential that they were probably not even seen by the Chief Clerk. These chiefly concerned the affairs of county families, which sometimes received the attention of the Chief Constable to an extent that would have surprised and shocked the subjects of them. There was even an indexed *dossier*, kept by the Chief Constable himself, which, had its existence been realised, would

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

have caused a scandalised fluttering of patrician dove-cotes. The acting-Chief Constable assured himself, not without qualms of conscience, that when time allowed it would be his duty to place himself *au fait* with the affairs of his temporary office.

Reluctantly locking that drawer, Venning turned to the last, the centre one above the knee-hole. Here were note-books, scribbling pads and odd sheets of foolscap, many of them covered with the Chief Constable's sprawling calligraphy. Glancing mechanically through these, Superintendent Venning suddenly checked and stared at a sheet on which only one line was written, again in Captain Scole's hand.

The single line ran :

Brancashire Contract £1,660. 5% = £83.

For nearly half a minute Venning continued to stare at the words in front of him, his rugged face turning first to a deep red and then the colour fading till it left a haggard white mask. Mechanically he folded up the paper, slipped it into his pocket-book, and buttoned it away into his breast-pocket.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER VI

PUBLIC OPINION

FROM an early hour on the following, Tuesday, morning, Superintendent Venning had been at work in his new office—the room in which Captain Scole had been murdered. The large table had been cleared of its paraphernalia, and its top was now covered with an assortment of calipers and lenses, a microscope, a watchmaker's glass, some plasticine, a spot torch and other instruments, together with an automatic pistol, a matchbox containing three spent bullets, two cartridge-cases, and a number of sheets of paper covered with notes and figures in the Superintendent's laborious handwriting. To the automatic pistol was attached a small label, marked 'Exhibit 1. X.'

At the moment, Venning was holding in the palms of his two hands two bullets; that on the left hand was of almost normal shape and was in fact the bullet which Dr. Pugh had extracted from the dead man's head—'fired', he had reported,' from practically straight in front'. To this bullet also there was attached a label: 'Exhibit 2. X'. On his left palm lay the crumpled bullet which he and Inspector Parry had extracted from the plaster on the previous evening. It bore as yet no label, but on the desk lay a label marked in pencil: 'Exhibit 3. ?'.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

As a young Inspector, Venning had attended an advanced course in ' Firearms, their use and identification '. Ever since then he had cultivated the subject as a hobby and had always looked forward to the day when his knowledge might help to solve some problem, perhaps even bring a murderer to the gallows. The conviction of Browne and Kennedy, the murderers of P.C. Gutteridge, on evidence of this character had moved him profoundly, and it seemed as if the time had at last come to put his knowledge to the test.

In spite of this, however, his expression did not reflect the eager interest that he might have been expected to feel. His normal colour had returned, but the haggard look on his face seemed, if anything, to have deepened. He laid the whole bullet back on the table and turned his attention to the crumpled one, scrutinizing its base carefully through the watchmaker's glass. Before he had completed his examination an interruption occurred ; Inspector Tallard knocked at the door and announced that General Cawdon wished to speak to him.

" I showed him into my room, sir ", he said ; " I knew you were busy with all this and I thought you might not want it to be disturbed. Will you see him down there, sir, while I keep an eye on this ? "

After a moment's hesitation, Superintendent Venning nodded.

" Thank you, Tallard, I'll do that ", he said. " Don't touch these things."

Downstairs in Inspector Tallard's room, Venning found the brisk, rather pompous little General in no way subdued by the occasion.

" Morning, Superintendent," he exclaimed. " We

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

met last week. Little thought what a tragedy was hanging over us, eh ? I hear it said that poor Scole was shot by some released murderer. That true, eh ? What's capital punishment for if murderers are to be let out to commit another ? "

Superintendent Venning waited quietly for the spate to subside.

" It seems possible that the crime may have been committed by a man who is known to have had a grudge against the Chief Constable, sir. He uttered threats last week and we have been looking for him since then."

" And he got through you, eh ? Bad business that, Superintendent. What were your sentries doing ? Asleep ? Death penalty for a sentry who sleeps at his post ; you know that—an old battalion commander. War time, of course ; but the police are always at war—or should be."

Venning remained silent. As an old commanding officer he knew brigadiers ; they'd got to be allowed to run themselves down. Not enough to do ; that was the trouble with most of them. Tiresome waste of time, though, with a hundred and one things waiting to be done.

" Scotland Yard sent a man down yet ? "

" No, sir."

" What ? Why not ? Don't they know about it ? Haven't you reported ? "

" They know, sir ; yes. They're issuing an Information and supplying photographs, and of course helping to find this man if he's gone to London."

" Supplying photographs ? Why on earth aren't they sending a man down ? "

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"They haven't been asked to, sir", replied Venning mildly.

"Not asked to? Why don't they send as a matter of course? Their job to investigate crime, isn't it? C.I.D. That stands for Criminal Investigation Department, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but their authority only runs in the Metropolitan area. They only send officers down to the County and Borough police forces if they're specially asked to."

General Cawdon snorted.

"Ridiculous red tape. Well, why aren't they asked to, then? Whose job is it?"

"The Chief Constable's, sir."

"Well, the Chief Constable's dead, isn't he? What happens then?"

"The Deputy Chief Constable takes on, sir. That happens to be me, in this case."

"Then why don't you . . .?"

But Superintendent Venning's patience was wearing thin. He so far forgot himself as to short circuit the rising tirade.

"I have to exercise my judgment as to that, sir. At the moment I don't consider it necessary to call in the Yard. You'll excuse me, General, I'm sure, but I've got . . ."

Fortunately, perhaps, he in his turn was interrupted by the arrival of the Chairman of the Standing Joint Committee, the composite body of magistrates and County Councillors whose task it was to administer the police organization in the county. Sir George Playhurst had been Chairman now for nearly twenty years. He was a tall, heavily-built man, slow-moving both in body and mind. As a

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN