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GOD'S PRISONER

A STORY

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

"The Lord despiseth not his prisoners,
He brought them out of Darkness
And the Shadow of Death,
And brake their bands in sunder."

THE PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1899

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TO

YOU

WHO HAVE HELPED

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GOD'S PRISONER

Book 1.

THE CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

JOHN BRODIE sat at his desk in his private office, and glowered at the ledger in front of him—thunder and lightning incarnate.

His face, ordinarily grave and full of the kindliest consideration and courtesy, was furrowed into deep corrugations; his tight-pressed lips were cast-iron in their rigidness, but the throbbing pulse in cheek and temple showed that his teeth were grinding savagely; his hands were clenched as though to strike. The whole usual aspect of the man—the calm, unruffled imperturbability—the powerful reserve and self-control, which had carried him so far and so high among his fellows, had, for the moment, fallen from him, and he fairly shook in a wild storm of anger.

He raised his wrathful eyes for a moment and gazed stormily into nothingness, then whirled over the pages again, compared several entries, and banged his hand down on the push of the electric bell on his desk, and

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held it there while the shrill peal thrilled the office with its wild alarm.

A disheveled small boy dashed in, wide-eyed and white at the unusual imperativeness of the summons.

"Send McCaskie!"

The small boy fled, thanking his stars that his name was not McCaskie, and, having done his errand, slid back to his desk and informed the clerks in the outer office that there was a big row on, and that Mr. McCaskie was in for it this time, dead sure.

McCaskie, the cashier, appeared at the door of the private office, a tall, smart, good-looking fellow, trimly groomed and well dressed, better dressed if anything than his master. He had been with the firm for fifteen years, and knew all the ins and outs of the business as well as John Brodie did himself. In the whole of that fifteen years he had never seen John Brodie look as he did just now.

"Shut the door, McCaskie! What is the meaning of this—and this—and this?"

McCaskie's jaw tightened almost imperceptibly as he came round and stood by Brodie's side and glanced down at the items indicated by Brodie's long finger as he turned over the pages. He stooped and carefully examined the entries.

"Those are not my entries, Mr. Brodie;" and the tension of his face relaxed.

"Whose are they?" asked Brodie harshly.

McCaskie only looked at him and was silent.

"Speak, man!" said Brodie, striking the desk with clenched fist. "D—— it, are you gone dumb?"

Never in his whole fifteen years had McCaskie, or any of his staff, heard John Brodie use an oath before.

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He was too strong a man to stoop to strong language. McCaskie was still silent, but at last, under Brodie's savagely questioning gaze, he said:

"That ledger is rarely in my possession, as you know, Mr. Brodie. Any entries not mine must be either yours or Mr. Ayrton's."

"By which you mean that, as they are not mine, they are Ayrton's?"

The cashier was silent.

Brodie waved him to a seat, Ayrton's seat, on the other side of the wide desk.

"Now, McCaskie, let us have this out at once. What is the meaning of it? The books have been tampered with!"

"It looks like it."

"By my partner?"

McCaskie raised his eyebrows non-committally.

"Do you know to what extent?"

"I do not, Mr. Brodie. The entries you have pointed out are all of recent date."

"What has he been up to now?"

McCaskie was silent.

"Speak, if you know!" urged Brodie. "I have a right to know all you can tell me, McCaskie."

"It is only hearsay, Mr. Brodie. I have heard that Mr. Ayrton has lost heavily in Argentines lately."

"Ah! Couldn't the fool be content with dropping his money on the turf and at cards without throwing it into the bottomless pit? Send up at once to Mr. Ayrton's chambers and say I must see him here again before I start to-night. I shall be here till nine. The mail leaves at ten. Good God! to think of this thing turning up just at this juncture!"

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McCaskie bowed and withdrew, and John Brodie got up and paced the room savagely.

And he had reason.

He was starting that night for China on business involving a five-figure profit and an immense future for the firm, and admitting of not one instant's delay; and here at the very last moment, he had stumbled, quite by accident, on a flaw in the foundation of his business—a flaw which might endanger the safety of the structure he had spent so many toilsome years in raising.

It was atrocious. It was damnable, perfectly damnable, that his partner—the man who should have been his right hand, his other self, and a tower of strength—should prove a broken reed and a traitor.

He paced the room with sharp, quick turns, but presently the pace became slower and slower, and, buried in deep thought, he hardly moved.

The well-tried machinery of his brain was settling down to its regular steady beat, and he was beginning to see his way out. At last he smote his right fist into his left palm with a decisive crack, and said out loud:

"Yes, I will go!"

Then he sat down at his desk, dashed off a couple of letters, addressed the first envelope wrong, and tore it up angrily—that kind of thing was so unusual with him—addressed fresh envelopes, and sealed his letters. Then he rose and again paced the room slowly and full of thought, awaiting the arrival of his partner.

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CHAPTER II.

HOW JOHN BRODIE MARKED HIS COFFIN LID.

FIFTEEN years before John Brodie inherited from his father, "Chinese Brodie," as he was universally called, a thriving import and export business with the East. John Brodie the Second labored energetically on the solid foundation laid by the old man, and his business increased so fast that his capital was altogether insufficient for the proper working of the concern.

He looked round for a partner with money, brains, and energy.

James Ayrton was introduced by a common friend. His father had just died leaving him twenty thousand pounds. He was married to a girl from Brodie's own native Greenock, and was well spoken of as straight and energetic.

So the connection came about. Ayrton became a partner in the London house, and Brodie took in as partner in the Shanghai branch an old and trusted assistant who had been his father's right hand all the time he had lived in the East.

For ten years all went well. Then Ayrton's wife died. He had no children. His home life was broken up, and his energies began to dissipate in extraneous matters, and there arose a certain amount of friction between the partners.

Brodie had never been out to China, where his father had spent the best part of his life. But all over the eastern ports the reputation of the house stood

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high, and the name of Brodie was a name to conjure with.

He had long contemplated a visit to the East, and now the sudden death of his partner in Shanghai rendered the visit imperative, and necessitated an almost instantaneous departure. For, after long planning and the most careful consideration, the Shanghai house had undertaken a great and somewhat speculative contract, which, rightly engineered, and successfully carried through, meant very large immediate profits and immense possibilities for the future.

Brodie did not hesitate. On receipt of the cablegram announcing his partner's sudden death, he booked a passage by the next P. and O. boat, gave Henry Verrier, his solicitor—a close personal friend, and the only honest lawyer he had ever met, Brodie always said—his power of attorney over all his affairs, and tenderly packed his curios—of which he was an ardent collector, and many of which were almost priceless—into a couple of big tin-lined wooden cases from the office, which he sealed with his own seal, and himself conveyed to the Safe Deposit Vaults in Queen Victoria Street.

Then he put his house into an agent's hands to let furnished for a year, and within a week from the day the cablegram arrived he was ready to start.

And then—within a few hours of his departure—he stumbled, quite by accident, on this wretched default in his partner, and it angered him beyond all words.

He had been only too keenly cognizant for months past of Ayrton's loss of interest in business matters, and general laxity. But he had got so used to trusting him fully and implicitly that he had never dreamt

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of imputing to him more than a perhaps not unnatural upsetting, resulting from the sudden break-up of his home life.

Brodie never discussed the matter with him.

As his wont was, he showed his displeasure by a cold reserve in their business intercourse, and left Ayrton to appreciate the reason and to mend his ways.

The clock on the mantel chimed six, and the sudden turmoil in the outer office, and the clanging of safe doors, showed that the staff was preparing to leave. The clearance was slower than usual, however, and presently a tap at the door evoked a sonorous "Come" from Brodie, and McCaskie entered with a somewhat doubtful glance at his chief's face.

"They are all waiting to say 'Good-by' to you, sir. Will you see them?"

Brodie's lips gave a twitch, but he controlled his face, and walked out into the office.

"Good-by, boys!" he said. "Do your duty by the firm while I am away. Good-by! Good-by!"

He shook hands with each one, down to the office boy, and every one of the warehousemen, and wishing him a good voyage and speedy return, they trooped away.

Old Jenks, the foreman packer, very red in the face, and more than usually watery about the eyes, was the last, and Brodie, as he shook the horny hand that had nailed up "J. B." cases for nearly forty years, said—perpetrating the joke of the office on the old man:

"Good-by, Jenks. What is your figure now?"

And the old man said hoarsely:

"22,221, Mr. Brodie, sir. Them two cases o' yours

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just bringed it up to 22,221. I wish you could ha' made it the even figure. It would ha' looked more lucky like."

Brodie laughed in spite of himself, and then said:

"You leave me out a good strong case with a tin lining in, Jenks, and I'll see if there isn't something else I want to put in it. I've some books which might be best sealed up. Mark the lid 22,222. No, don't wait for me. Just leave it ready. I shall run up to the house for some things. Now, good-by!"

And the satisfied Jenks disappeared into the depths to execute the master's last orders.

"Shall I wait, Mr. Brodie? Can I be of any further service?" asked McCaskie.

"Is the boy back from Mr. Ayrton's yet?"

"Not yet, sir. It's quite time he was," instinctively looking at his watch.

Brodie pondered for a moment. "Just run round to Verrier's and ask Mr. Henry Verrier if he could step over here for a minute, McCaskie."

McCaskie was back in five minutes. Mr. Henry Verrier had been summoned suddenly to Glasgow, and would not be back for three days.

Just then the boy who had been up to Ayrton's chambers in Piccadilly came panting in. Mr. Ayrton was out and would not be in till half-past seven, but they would give him the letter as soon as he came in.

Brodie's face darkened again.

"I don't think you need wait, McCaskie. There is no knowing when he will get here. I have to run up to the house for my portmanteau and some odds and ends. I shall be back here before Ayrton comes. I shall just have time to ventilate this matter with him

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before leaving. Henry Verrier has my power of attorney, as you know. Morris & Keen will overhaul the books at once. I have written to both of them. Among you, you must keep things ship-shape till I return."

"It is most unfortunate your having to go just when this matter turns up."

"Unfortunate! it is simply damnable! But there is more to lose by not going than by going, as you know. I am on thorns at thought of what may be going on in Shanghai. If this matter turns out as it should do, that will practically become the center of our operations for some time to come. Perhaps I may decide to stop there altogether, there's no knowing. Well, good-by, McCaskie! Do your best for the firm."

"I will, Mr. Brodie. Good-by, sir, and *bon voyage*."

"Leave the side door on the Yale; I will come in that way, and, by the way, post these for me as you go. Good-by again!"

And Brodie heard his footsteps down the stairs and through the warehouse. Then he heard the side door slam, and he was alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE IRREVOCABLE STEP.

BRODIE came out a few minutes later, sprang into a cab, and was driven off to his home. He was back within the hour, and the cabman carried his portmanteau and half a dozen parcels of books, hurriedly tied up in bundles, to the side door, and Brodie himself

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passed them inside. As cabs are not always obtainable just when wanted in that quarter of the city, at that time of night, he bade the man wait.

It was eight o'clock, but Ayrton had not yet put in an appearance, and, pacing the private office, Brodie impatiently awaited his coming.

The partners had separated at midday, Ayrton leaving on plea of a pressing engagement, and they had not thought to meet again for a year or more. Brodie had a shrewd idea of the nature of the pressing engagement, but had raised no objections. They had been in close confabulation, discussing plans and ideas for four days, and had settled all arrangements for the carrying on of the business in Brodie's absence. And then—actually as the result of Ayrton's absence, which left three or four unoccupied hours on his hands—Brodie had begun casually turning over the leaves of the private ledger, and his eyes were opened.

The clock chimed half-past eight. His time was getting short—ridiculously short for the work in hand. The storm gathered in his face again, and his teeth ground slowly and savagely.

At last! Brodie heard the slam of the outer door, then the quick, familiar step on the stair, and his partner entered, a tall, well-made fellow in evening dress and a light overcoat.

"Hello, old man!" he began, with an assumption of jocularity, "thought our fond adieux were completed. Only just got your note or would have been here sooner. Some last words?"

Brodie stood and looked at him, black disgust and indignation showing in his eyes and the corners of his mouth, in spite of all his self-control. He noted the

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deepened color of the other's face. The sullen droop of the eyelids, the slight hardening of his tones—signs he knew only too well.

Now that he had got the man here he could barely trust himself to speak. He felt perfectly volcanic. Had the words come out as they surged in his brain, if Ayrton had any grain of self-respect left, they would have blasted him where he stood.

The silence grew ominous.

"D—— it! what's wrong?" asked Ayrton.

"Sit down!" said Brodie, through his teeth, and Ayrton dropped into his accustomed seat.

Brodie swung open the safe door, drew out the ledger, whirled it open on the desk in front of the other, and said in a voice that cut like a knife:

"You ask what's wrong. What is this—and this—and this?" His voice had lapsed into a hiss. "You despicable scoundrel! What's wrong? You're wrong, James Ayrton, and, by God! you shall suffer for it! Haven't you drawn enough in the last twelve months to almost shake the credit of the firm, without descending to forgery and falsification in order to steal more? Fool—idiot—swindler!"

The volcano boiled over. The words poured out like a fury of hot lava. He lost all control over himself and did not know what he was saying.

"To jail you shall go as sure as my name is Brodie. You thought to be rid of me—to go on thieving at your leisure. But here I stop till I see you laid by the heels. You mean, pitiful, swindling——"

Words failed him—he fairly choked with the violence of his unaccustomed rage. He advanced a step with clenched fists as though to seize his partner.

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And then the end came, swift and terrible. A sharp crack, a curl of blue smoke, and Brodie sank down in a huddled heap on the floor.

Ayrton had sat bending forward, gazing at the ledger and pulling viciously at his mustache. He was in a dour and excited frame of mind himself. He had been at a race-meeting that afternoon, had lost heavily, and had drunk enough to make him savage. His gloomy eyes saw past the figures in the ledger—past the menacing figure in front of him—saw ruin and disgrace—saw that the end had come, and his hand slid into his private drawer, and groped for the revolver that always lay there.

He had often contemplated suicide as the only way out of the network of troubles he had landed himself in. But when Brodie advanced, with an unpremeditated instinct of self-defense Ayrton turned the weapon on him, and the bullet intended for himself found its way to Brodie's heart.

Ayrton sprang toward him and bent over him horror-stricken. The other never stirred. Ayrton shrinkingly placed his hand against his heart. Then he stumbled back to his chair and crouched, head in hands, gazing stonily into vacancy.

CHAPTER IV.

SEALED FROM SIGHT.

A LOUD knocking at the door downstairs startled him to his feet. He waited, his heart going like a ship's pump.

Perhaps it was only the postman mechanically

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knocking as he dropped the letters into the box. If so there would be no second knock.

If it was somebody who knew that either he or Brodie was there—then——

The knock came again, loud and impatient. He turned out the light in the office, put on his hat, and went downstairs, and with shaking fingers opened the door.

"Now then, guv'nor," said a hoarse voice, "have yer forgot I'm a-waitin' here for over an hour?"

"I never told you to wait."

"Ho! Never told me to wait, didn't yer? Yes, but you did, mister! Says you——"

"Ah! I see you are not the man who drove me here. It would be——"

"Beg pardon, sir! I sees it wasn't you. It was the gent with the lot o' books and the big portmanty."

"I see. Just wait a minute and I'll see if he wants you to wait still. I doubt if he'll be ready for an hour yet."

"Oh, don't you 'urry 'im, mister. I can wait all night, so long as it's understood I am a-waitin'."

Ayrton closed the door, and presently re-opened it, and told the man he was not to wait any longer. He gave him five shillings, and the man drove away with a "Right you are, guv'nor."

Then he fastened the door and fell to pacing the warehouse in the dark. The thought of the office upstairs, and what it contained, was too much for him.

He bumped up against an empty case which lay out in the middle of the floor, and then stumbled over the lid which stood up against it, and brought it down with a clatter that shook his nerves.

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He struck a match and lighted a gas jet so as to avoid further bruises.

It was a big new case, with the tin lining placed inside it, all ready to be packed. On the inside of the loose lid which lay upside down on the floor, were stenciled the words: "WITH J. JENKS'S BEST WISHES." He picked up the lid. On the outside was the firm's regular shipping mark, "J. B." in a diamond, and the figures 22,222.

Ayrton stood looking at them. Brodie had probably intended packing the books he had brought down, into the case, and sending it to his room in the Safe Deposit Vaults after his other cases. The case put an idea into his head, and he turned and paced to and fro thinking it out.

Yes, it would do. It would give him a short respite —time to consider his next move—perhaps time to get away, if he could realize sufficient funds to get away with. He threw off his coat, turned up his cuffs, and set to work. First he carried in from the side door all Brodie's books, and placed a layer of them in the case. Then he went slowly up to the office. He hated to touch or even to look at the huddled heap on the floor. But it had to be done. He stooped and turned it over, and from the watch chain he detached Brodie's gold seal. It was horrible. It felt like robbing the dead, but he had to have it. Then, with averted head and pricking flesh, he dragged the body downstairs and doubled it into the packing case. Then up to the sample room, whence he returned carrying several boxes of pungent aromatic Eastern scents, which he emptied wholesale into the case. Then he spread another layer of books so that the hor-

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rible fantastic thing inside was completely hidden, and with a sigh of relief he laid the tin lid in its place, and with a wooden mallet bent over on to it the overlapping edges of the tin lining.

He was dripping with perspiration, but his work was not yet completed.

He sought out the necessary tools—the solder, the resin, the blowpipe and spirit lamp, and set to work awkwardly enough to solder up the inner case.

He burnt his hands, he squandered resin and solder till the lid looked like a grotesque bas-relief. But at last it was done. Then he nailed down the wooden lid with the longest nails and the heaviest hammer he could find.

He was tired to death, and hands and knees alike were trembling with the unusual exertion and with the rattling of his nerves. One of the last blows missed the nail and fell on his own thumb, splitting it to the bone.

But he still had to seal the case. A stout twisted wire was already fitted into a groove running round the bottom and sides. He fitted the ends of the wire into the groove in the lid, cleated them into the round hole where they met, poured in the sealing wax, and impressed it with Brodie's own seal.

Then he took the taper, and mounted the stairs slowly, examining every inch of every step, right back into the private office. But there were no incriminating traces. The bullet was a small one, but it had gone very straight and done its work. If any blood flowed, it had been sopped up in the dead man's clothes.

Then he opened an old unused safe that was built

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into the wall, carried up the portmanteau and the remaining books, flung them in, threw in Brodie's hat and traveling coat, and broke and bent his umbrella, and flung it in too, and locked the safe. He put the ledger into its usual place in the big safe, and dropped into his chair utterly exhausted.

And so it was over. He was a murderer. He had never thought to sink to that. He had done many things which would not bear thinking of, but he had always had a lurking hope of being able by some fortunate chance to make good his defaults. But this—this was the irreparable crime. He had crossed the line which never could be recrossed. Well, anyhow for a time he was safe—for a few days—until it cropped up somehow or other that Brodie never sailed on the *Poonah*, and inquiry arose as to where he was and what had become of him.

He glanced round the room before turning out the light, and a torn envelope under the table caught his eye. He picked it up carelessly, and then held it with shaking hand. It bore the name, in Brodie's bold, flowing writing, of Henry Verrier, the lawyer, but the actual address was that of Morris & Keen, the accountants. Ayrton noted the error in the address and understood it.

Brodie had written to both Verrier, his lawyer, and to Morris & Keen, the accountants. His delinquencies were probably known to them, or would be as soon as they received the letters, and this last desperate deed was probably futile.

He shivered and crept downstairs.

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Book II.

THE PUNISHMENT.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE RACK.

AYRTON put in an appearance at the office earlier than usual next morning. He was there before any of the clerks, to their great confusion. The first thing he did, after carefully fastening the door of the private office, was to open the old safe and fling in Brodie's gold seal with which he had sealed the case the previous night. He had found it among his things when he emptied his pockets, and he wanted to be rid of it.

He had passed a night of sleepless horror—his mind a chaos of doubts and terrors. On the very doorstep of the warehouse he hesitated, and hung in doubt as to whether he should enter or should turn and flee to the uttermost end of the earth. But cold common sense told him that his only chance of even temporary safety lay in facing the situation. For one thing, he lacked money enough to get away with, in the way he would wish to go.

The chances were that whatever Brodie had written to Morris & Keen, the accountants, they would not

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make any great headway in the books for a day or two, and that time might at all events suffice for him to collect some capital toward a fresh start elsewhere. Then there was the case to be disposed of. His very first business must be to bury it in the Safe Deposit Vaults. He hung in the wind on the doorstep, then took a long breath, as one does before a cold plunge, clenched his jaw tight, and stepped inside.

Every nerve of him was on the alert for accusatory signs or sounds.

But everything looked as usual. The piled-up cases did not shriek out the sights they had seen the night before, the stairs showed no traces of the horrible burden that had been dragged down them so limply and heavily. His nerves got their first jar, however, before he got upstairs to his office.

In the center of the packing room lay the Case No. 22,222, and Jenks the foreman stood looking at it.

"Mornin', Mr. Ayrton, sir!" he said, as soon as he saw Ayrton, "them's the guv'nor's books, I s'pose. Did he pack 'em himself?"

"I suppose he did, Jenks."

"Humph! I 'spects he's forgotten to solder the tin lid of the inside case, and if he thought of it, I don't s'pose he knowed how to do it proper. I've half a mind just to spring that lid and see as it's all right."

"No, don't touch it, Jenks. Leave it just as Mr. Brodie left it. I'm going to take it to the Safe Deposit as soon as I've gone through the letters. Mr. Brodie would see to it all right."

"Right you are, sir, if you says so. Did he—did Mr. Brodie say anything about the case, sir?"

"Yes, he got your message, Jenks, and told me to

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thank you and to give you this;" and he gave the old fellow a half sovereign.

"Ah, much obliged to him, sir, and much obliged to you, sir. He always were a good sort, were Mr. Brodie. How long do you reckon he'll be away, Mr. Ayrton?"

"A year, maybe;" and Ayrton passed on up the stairs to the office.

The letters lay on Brodie's desk as usual. He sat down in Brodie's chair and proceeded to open them.

Among the first that came to his hand was one from McCaskie. It was addressed to the firm, and simply stated that through a slight accident to his foot the night before, he was ordered by the doctor to lay up for a day or two.

This was a distinct relief. In his present state of nervous tension and depression, McCaskie would have been a worry and an annoyance to him.

He rapidly disposed of the day's work—dictating letters, issuing the necessary orders right and left, and driving matters with a strong hand, to the astonishment of the staff, who had looked forward to easy times while Mr. Brodie was away.

But Ayrton wanted to get away lest Verrier or Morris & Keen should drop in, and every time a visitor was announced his heart plunged and leaped in a way that caused him actual physical pain.

The morning's work disposed of, Ayrton took his hat and went downstairs to see after Case No. *22,222*. He had it put on to a cab, and drove off with it to the Safe Deposit Vaults in Queen Victoria Street. But on the road he remembered that Brodie would have his own key of his strong room in his pocket, and that

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the Safe Deposit people would have only the counter key necessary to complete the operation of opening the door. Their key alone would not open it.

He put his head out of the window and told the man to drive to the Safe Deposit Company in Chancery Lane. There he took a small strong room in the name of John Brodie, deposited the case, and drove away home to his chambers, as fagged and weary with the nervous strain as if he had been through a prize-fight, and been badly beaten.

He got no sleep that night either. For though the first keen edge of his horror had worn off with the safety of the day, his wounded thumb twinged and throbbed as though every possible sensitiveness to pain in his whole body had combined with his conscience to keep alive the memory of his crime.

Racked with pain, and tortured by his thoughts, he tried to drown both with heavy drinking. But while this to some extent deadened his recollections of the previous night's work, it only increased the pain of the wound, and the morning found him hollow-eyed and haggard, and utterly worn out.

However, he had to brace up again, and go down to the office to get through the day as best he might, and he determined to see a doctor, have his thumb attended to, and obtain from him such drugs as would insure him sufficient sleep to keep his brain from getting unhinged.

As he passed through the warehouse to go to his office his eye fell on the lid of a packing case stuck up in a prominent position, as though purposely placed to attract attention. The lid was marked "J. B." in a diamond, No. 22,222.

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Ayrton stopped short and caught a sharp breath, and then passed on to his office with an effort. That was the lid he had nailed down over Brodie's body. How did it get there?

Controlling himself by an effort, he disposed of the morning's mail. Then he lit a cigar and strolled out into the packing room. He must see the back of that lid. If it bore Jenks's farewell message to Brodie, there could be no doubt about it. If it was the identical lid, how in the devil's name had it got there? Had Jenks, against his instructions, opened the case while his back was turned? If so, Jenks should go out head first, and his place would know him no more. Even if he had, however, it was unlikely he would have opened the tin lining when he saw that it had been securely made up.

Jenks was not in sight. The other men were piling up some goods at the far end of the room. Ayrton strolled casually up to the lid and turned it slightly with the hand. On the back was the legend in big black stenciled letters, "WITH J. JENKS'S BEST WISHES"—just as he had seen them that other night.

His heart stood still, and he bit into the cigar savagely. Then he pulled himself together again.

"What's this?" he asked one of the men who was passing, indicating the lid.

"I d'n know, sir. I see Jenks with it last night. The men says it's——" and he hesitated.

"Say it's what?"

"They call it Mr. Brodie's tombstone, sir!"

"Where's Jenks?" asked Ayrton sharply.

"He's went out, sir. I d'n know where he's——"

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Here Jenks appeared, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, and, informed of the matter in question, he hastened to explain.

"That were the lid, sir, o' Mr. Brodie's box o' books." Ayrton's heart stood still. "I got it all ready and then found the wire grooves didn't fit right, so I marked up another one. I put it up there just to mind me o' Mr. Brodie. A kind o' momento, as you might say. Them fools o' men calls it his tomb-stone."

"All right, Jenks. We don't need any tombstones. Clear off the marks and fit it to its proper case, then we shall have no mistakes made."

"Right you are, sir!"

And Ayrton went back to his office breathing freely.

CHAPTER II.

BREATHING SPACE.

THE second mail had just come in, and among the letters was one from McCaskie. It bore the Paris post-mark, to Ayrton's great surprise, and it ran thus:

"JAS. AYRTON, Esq.,

"MESSRS. BRODIE & CO.

"DEAR SIR: By my doctor's advice I am going to take up my residence in Spain, and shall arrive there to-morrow night. The necessities of the case will compel me to make a lengthened stay. I therefore tender my resignation of the post I have hitherto held

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in your office. The reasons which compel my residence there prevent my giving you any address.

"Wishing the firm all prosperity,

"I remain, dear sir,

"Yours in haste,

"RONALD MCCASKIE."

Ayrton read this epistle twice before the true meaning of it dawned upon him. Then light broke in on him. He smote his knee and ejaculated, "Saved! by Gad!" and jumped up and paced the room with a new spring in his step.

Yes, this letter of McCaskie's saved him at all events from any consequences which might arise from the overhauling of the books, for all defaults could now be put down to the absconded cashier.

"I had no idea he'd been at it too," said Ayrton to himself.

This matter gave such a fillip to his spirits that he ventured on a stroll down the Lane. He had gone but a few steps, however, when he was met by a very old friend of the firm, one John Bloxham, and Bloxham greeted him with:

"Hello, Ayrton, old man, what's wrong with you? You're not looking up to the mark."

Ayrton regretted his temerity in emerging from the office, but made shift to answer:

"No, I'm seedy. Smashed my thumb in a carriage door. Can't get any sleep."

"Ah, you should try morphine. It knocks me off like a shot."

"Well, I'll see a doctor to-day about the thumb, and get him to fix the other matter at the same time."

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"What did you do with Brodie the other night?"

Ayrton got a grip of himself in the most literal sense. For with the hand that was in his trouser pocket he pinched his leg so fiercely that the mark remained for a month.

."What do you mean?"

"I thought he was going by that ten o'clock train for Paris to catch the boat at Brindisi?"

"Yes."

"But he didn't go, did he?"

"As far as I know he went all right. What made you think he didn't go?"

"Well, I was at the station seeing a friend off who's going out by the same boat. I wanted to introduce them. But Brodie never turned up."

"That's strange," said Ayrton. "Brodie doesn't often miss a train when he sets out to catch it."

"He must have gone some other route," said Bloxham, "or you would have had him back at the office. Anyhow, we shall hear from Brindisi or Suez whether he caught the boat or not."

"Surely," said Ayrton, and passed on disturbed.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRINDING OF THE MILLS.

The days passed, and the nights—those awful nights! The days were torture—the nights were hell. Ayrton's thumb had been more seriously hurt than he at first imagined. It showed symptoms of blood-poisoning and gathering. Sharp lancinating pains

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shot from it all up his arm. It twinged and throbbed beyond endurance. Every drop of blood in his body seemed to pass through that thumb, and every pulse-beat was like the stabbing of a thousand white-hot needles.

In the day, busy with other things, he felt it less, but through the lonely hours of the night it kept him on the rack.

He tried by every means in his power to get away from himself and the horror of his thoughts. His club sickened him with its shallow tittle-tattle and polished respectability. His crime had placed him on a different plane from his fellows. He had lost touch with his kind, and he did not need their avoidance of him to recognize the fact.

One night as he sat in a corner of the smoking room of his club, chewing gloomily at his cigar, and trying to drink his thoughts away, the pain of his wound grew suddenly so intense that he bit his lips till they bled, in the effort to keep down the groan that would have given him relief. He flung away his cigar. It blistered his lips. The agony in his arm made his eyes swim. He groped for a champagne cork which some reveler had been toying with in the dining room and had brought into the smoking room. He put the cork into his mouth, and bit with so fierce a grip that his teeth worked through it and met. He bit the pieces till his mouth was full of the dry fragments. He chewed them like a pulping machine till they got into his throat and set him coughing, to the amusement of a party of gilded youths who had been eying his proceedings with vacant amusement. One of them laughed vacuously, and Ayrton saw that they

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were watching him. He spat out the cork, glared at them out of eyes that made one or two of them shiver, then rose and staggered away.

"Gad!" said one of the brainless ones, "what's wrong with him?"

"Hurt his thumb!" replied another sententiously.

"Goin' mad, I should say," said a third.

"Guess she's gone back on him," surmised a fourth.

Ayrton went no more to the club.

He dragged his burdened soul and his agonized body through a weary round of dissipation—theaters, music-halls, and worse. He tried everything, but nowhere found relief. Like the singer of old he found no outlet of escape. Wounded body and wounded soul, acting and reacting on one another, seemed like to drive him out of his mind.

Sleep he could not get at any cost. All through the day those cursed letters "J. B. 22,222" danced before his eyes, just as he had seen them on Brodie's coffin lid when he nailed it down and smashed his thumb. And in the deadest hours of the night, in the loneliness of his chamber, when he tried to shut them out by closing his eyes, they gleamed and danced in yellow fire before him, and burnt into his brain a Belshazzar-like message of doom and destruction.

He tried drug after drug, and at times succeeded in rendering himself insensible for a time. But each awakening brought back his horrors in fuller force.

Once or twice he came perilously near passing the irrevocable boundary, but each time he struggled slowly back to life, and wearily took up the burden of it again.

Why did he not cut the thread and escape?

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God knows! Perhaps because he felt that escape was impossible—that if he got out of this life the next would offer him no better, even if it could condemn him to no worse.

Perhaps because life, even at its worst, still has possibilities, and because the bull-dog in him refused to acknowledge itself beaten while life lasted. Perhaps because the game is not left entirely to the players, though their cognizance of the Higher Hand in it is small and purblind.

Down town at the office, his restless activity was winning him golden opinions from the business connections of the firm, who had expected to see him carry on even more loosely in Brodie's absence than he had done before.

But they found him constant at his work, keen, alert, and concentrated. They watched him grow hollow-eyed and haggard; and, putting it down to his great labors and responsibilities, they advised him not to overdo it, but to get away for a change.

The time passed, and Morris & Keen had made no sign. The suspense was too great to be borne.

After much pondering Ayrton determined to see them, and from observation find out how the land lay.

Yet he hesitated. Why stir the matter up? And so he waited and waited, but at last nerved himself for the visit.

Morris was away. He saw Keen, and his welcome was calculated to disarm any idea of suspicion on their part.

"Well, Mr. Ayrton, what news have you of Mr. Brodie?"

"None yet," said Ayrton, eying closely every ex-

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pression of the other's face. "It's almost too soon yet."

"And what can we do for you, Mr. Ayrton?"

Ayrton tossed him McCaskie's letters. Keen read them through and whistled.

"McCaskie!" he said, "the last man I would have suspected. You want an investigation made at once, I suppose? Any idea how much he's had you for?"

"Not the slightest. You had better look into matters; quietly, you know. No need to spread it around. Better get to it as soon as you can."

Morris & Keen evidently knew nothing, and his mind was at rest on that point.

But the first person he met in the street on his way back to the office was the jovial Bloxham, who hailed him with:

"Hello, Ayrton! So Brodie caught the boat, after all. I just got a letter from Easdaile—Why, what the deuce——"

Ayrton had waved his hand and sped down the street, apparently in pursuit of some distant friend. His legs carried him automatically. He thanked God that his legs carried him, though little right had he to thank God for anything. His blood had become water, and his heart a stone. Yea, his heart had seemed to stop beating at Bloxham's words, and then began pounding away so furiously that his brain was like to burst, and everything swam round him. If he had not run, and if his legs had not worked in spite of him, he would have fallen.

If Bloxham had followed, he might well have thought him crazy.

He plunged blindly through the stream of 'buses

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and cabs in King William Street, and dived down the first narrow lane he came to. He took no heed of the people he ran against, nor of where he was going. He found himself at last on Old Swan Pier. A boat was just ranging up alongside. He mechanically walked aboard, and sat down.

What was it Bloxham had said?

"Brodie caught the boat, after all!"

"Brodie—caught—the—boat—after—all!"

What did it mean? Brodie was nailed up in Case No. 22,222 in the Safe Deposit Vaults, and Bloxham said he had caught the boat after all.

Was it a wretched joke of Bloxham's? What a devil the man must be to joke on a subject like—but, good God! Bloxham did not know anything about Case No. 22,222. What did it mean? In the devil's name, what did it mean?

The boat skimmed along and the paddles beat a devil's tattoo to the words that rang in Ayrton's whirling brain.

"Brodie caught the boat! Brodie caught the boat! Two—two—two—two—two! Two—two—two—two—two!"

A man came round after tickets, and Ayrton handed him money and took no note of the change, whereby the man defrauded him of twopence and concluded he was drunk.

The breeze refreshed him—the city was behind—mud and piles and coal-hoppers gradually fell astern—green banks rose on either side.

People came and went, and presently the boat stopped at Kew. The man who had made capital out of him told him they went no further, and hinted that

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there was a very good public on the other side of the bridge.

Ayrton walked ashore, and rambled into the gardens, and presently finding a solitary place, near a sunken pond, in the wilder part, he flung himself down on the breast of Mother Earth, and lay bruised, and sore, and sick to death.

He buried his forehead in the cool of the grass. He beat the turf with his unwounded hand, and clawed his fingers deep into the roots of it, and the smell of the earth and the bruised grass was soothing to him, and for the moment thirty years dropped out of his life, and he was a child again, grubbing up daisies in the meadow behind the old home.

"Brodie caught the boat! Brodie caught the boat! Two—two—two—two—two! Case No. 22,222!"

He lay there till his clothes were damp with dew and his limbs cramped and stiff.

The gates had long since been closed, and the gatekeeper greeted his appearance with strong language, and advised him to go home and get to bed, and not to forget to take his boots off. But when he looked into the haggard face of the man, and saw that he paid no more attention than if he had been made of wood, he recognized that this was a case beyond his ordinary ken, and suffered him to pass out in silence.

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CHAPTER IV.

GROUND SMALL.

AYRTON rambled on along the river-bank and found himself at Richmond. He went on with stolid automatic stride till he came to Twickenham. Here he turned into a waterside inn, and ate and drank, and then doggedly took the path again, and tramped back the way he had come—crossed the bridge at Kew and got into the highroad, and walked every foot of the way back into town.

He reached his chambers between two and three in the morning, footsore and weary.

But during the pilgrimage he made up his mind on two points as to the future, that is if any future were permitted to him.

He would devote all his energies during the next few months to the amassing of such a sum as would enable him to make a fresh start in some uttermost part of the earth—from choice some semi-civilized island in the Pacific—but anywhere, so long as it was out of the world.

He reckoned it would be at least five or six months before Brodie's disappearance could be definitely known, and suspicion aroused. In the meantime he would have to use all his wits to hoodwink inquiring friends, and he planned out several ways of doing this. And—he would avoid Bloxham.

That night, for the first time, he got a couple of hours' consecutive sleep,—fitful and broken, but undrugged and natural,—and the morning found him

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stiff and sore in body, but better balanced in mind than he had been since that terrible night.

It was one thing, however, to determine to avoid Bloxham, and quite another thing to be able to do so.

He had hardly disposed of his morning's mail, and was still busy dictating to his shorthand clerk, when the boy came in and announced, "Mr. Bloxham."

"Did you tell him I was in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, ask him to sit down for one moment."

Then he finished the letter he was at, dismissed the clerk, pulled his chair round, so that his back was toward the window, reached down a box of cigars, got one well alight, and rang the bell for Mr. Bloxham to be shown in.

The jovial Bloxham rolled in, in his usual hearty style, hat on back of head, cigar in mouth.

Ayrton bit into his cigar with the fierce grip of a man bracing up for an operation.

"Good-morning, Bloxham!" he said, through teeth and cigar. "I must apologize for quitting you so abruptly yesterday. I caught sight of a man I hadn't seen for five years, and if I'd missed him then——"

"Don't apologize, dear boy! don't apologize!"

"Let me see. What was it you were beginning to tell me? Something new in the way of a joke, wasn't it?"

"Not at all, dear boy, not at all! I was just saying I was glad old Brodie caught the boat after all."

Ayrton blew out a big veil of smoke.

"Of course he caught it. I told you he would, didn't I?"

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"You did, dear boy, you did! But how the deuce he managed it beats me. Easdaile sends me a line from Port Said, just to thank me for the card I gave him to Brodie, you know,—says he introduced himself, and Brodie was inclined to stand off and be stiff at first,—seemed even a bit annoyed. Can't you just see the old boy at it? But now they're the best of friends. But maybe Brodie wrote you himself?"

"Er—no—not yet. I've not had a line from him. He's—enjoying the rest, I expect, and will think it time enough to write when he has to buckle down to business."

"Aye, aye! quite likely. He was needing a change. I thought he looked very badly the last time I saw him. Did you notice it yourself?"

"Yes," said Ayrton grimly, rolling his cigar to the other side of his mouth, between his teeth. "I noticed it, and he felt it, too. Well, he'll have a good long rest now."

"Aye, aye! a long rest and change of scene ought to make a new man of him. Anything new in business?"

"No. Nothing! Things a bit dull."

"Same with us. Well, I'll move on. Ta, ta! Awfully glad old Brodie caught that boat."

"So long!" said Ayrton.

As the door closed behind him, Ayrton's eye caught the reflection of his own face in the small mirror on the wall opposite—caught it just as the mask fell from it. He spat the cigar, chewed to bitter pulp, into the waste-paper basket, softly pulled down the catch of the Yale lock, so that no one could break in on him, and then sat down in his chair, his hands gripping the

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arms of it, and his head sunk forward on his breast, his woeful eyes staring into vacancy.

What did it all mean? Bloxham was evidently in sober earnest.

"Brodie caught the boat. Brodie caught the boat. Case 22,222. Case 22,222."

What in the name of heaven—ah, no! he was outside the pale—what in the name of the devil did it mean?

Was he going crazy? Had he shot John Brodie, and nailed up his body in Case No. 22,222? Or was it all some horrible fantastic trick of his imagination?

He got up and picked out on his bunch the key of the old safe in the wall and opened it. Yes, Brodie's hat and portmanteau and the twisted umbrella lay there. They were real enough, and John Brodie's body lay in the Safe Deposit Vaults, and Bloxham said he had caught the boat. He locked the safe carefully and groped back to his chair, his brain spinning confusedly.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE'S IRONIES.

THE days wore on. Morris & Keen were deep in the books, and all defaults were duly ascribed to the absent McCaskie.

Ayrton's worried and anxious look did not escape notice, in spite of his studied efforts at nonchalance, but they were quietly and considerately ascribed to matters connected with McCaskie's disappearance which didn't had got bruited about.

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He stuck to his business still, in a way that won surprised encomiums from all his acquaintance. But he saw no immediate prospect of realizing his project and getting away with anything like the sum he considered necessary.

The accountants were enjoying themselves exceedingly among the books, and seemed in no hurry to get through with the business. They had pointed out to him that most of the defalcations had been foisted on to his own account, and he had quietly answered that that explained some remarks of Brodie's before he left, which had much puzzled him.

Then again money was not plentiful just now. The funds of the firm were very largely involved in the great speculation in China—in fact, for the time being China had become the center of operations, and London had to take second place.

And Ayrton writhed and groaned in the spirit to think that the great *coup* in China would fail, and all that money be lost, for want of the guiding hand which lay securely sealed up in Case No. 22,222 in the Safe Deposit Vaults in Chancery Lane.

Constant inquiries were made after Brodie. Ayrton could not walk down the street, or turn into the restaurant for lunch, without some friend of the firm tackling him on the subject; and though he steeled himself to answer with a certain amount of equanimity, the horrible incongruity or the ghastly aptness of some of the remarks made it difficult for him at times to refrain from bursting into wild and inextinguishable laughter.

The idea took possession of him that, if he once permitted himself to do this, his brain would give way.

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It would be the wild laughter of madness, and the narrow dividing line would never be recrossed by him.

And so he held himself in a grip of iron, and bore himself somberly, and grew more and more careworn in spite of himself.

"Well, Ayrton, what's the news from Brodie?" was the usual greeting.

"Nothing new," Ayrton would answer.

"Must be getting into a warm climate by this time."

"Yes, he's due at Singapore on the 28th."

"Having a good time, I suppose, and taking it easy."

"I suppose so. He doesn't trouble me with much correspondence."

"Lucky fellow. I wish I was in his shoes."

And Ayrton grimly wished so too, so that his chattering might be stopped.

"Brodie shown any signs of life yet, Ayrton?" another would ask.

And Ayrton would answer quietly:

"I've no fresh news from him, if that's what you mean."

And another.

"When do you expect Brodie to reach the promised land, old man?"

"Oh, not for some time yet. He's due at Shanghai on the 10th of next month!"

"H'm! So another couple of weeks will see him comfortably settled in his Celestial home?"

"Hope so," Ayrton would grimly reply.

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CHAPTER VI.

BLOW UPON BLOW.

LEST the office staff should think it strange that he never wrote to his partner, he carried on a full and careful correspondence with him, detailing all matters of moment in connection with the business.

He had the letters copied in the letter-book, and addressed to the house in China, but retained them, nominally for the purpose of inserting private letters of his own, and then burned instead of posting them.

He pondered the idea of writing letters to himself as from Brodie, from the various ports at which he touched, and bought thin foreign notepaper for the purpose, his intention being to leave these letters lying about on his desk, knowing well that the staff generally would very soon be cognizant of their contents.

But events happened which put him off the idea. He found in fact that his imagination could not keep pace with actualities.

His *bête-noire* Bloxham rolled in one day.

"Well, Ayrton, heard the news?"

"No. Who's dead now?"

"No one's dead. Quite the other way!"

"Oh! What is it?"

"About Brodie."

Ayrton offered Bloxham a cigar, and lit one himself.

"He's taking matters mighty easy, so far as correspondence goes."

"Ah, he's too busy otherwise," said Bloxham, enjoying himself greatly.

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"How's that?"

"Listen here. I got this from Easdaile this morning from Bombay. M-m-m-m-m—oh, here it is. 'Your friend Brodie and I have got very intimate. Indeed I am inclined to think we may become more than intimate before long. Brodie, in spite of his reticent stand-off ways, has made a great impression on Belle'—Belle's his sister, and a most charming girl,"—and Bloxham sighed—"'and the feeling seems to be more than reciprocated. It may, of course, be only an aggravated form of shipboard flirtation, but it seems to me to go much deeper, and neither Belle nor Brodie are absolutely frivolous beings, nor are they in the callowness of their first youth. They seem, indeed, to have made up their minds, and I expect in my next letter to have to inform you that they are engaged. You can be picturing me in your imagination doing the heavy father, and giving the young couple, who are both some years older than myself, my paternal benediction.'"

Ayrton, sitting back in his chair with a firm grip of the arms, was puffing his cigar as nonchalantly as might be, though his teeth almost met in it.

"That *is* news," he said, as Bloxham folded up his letter.

"Yes, I thought it would tickle you."

"It does," said Ayrton; "just think—of—old—Brodie—carrying on in that way!"

What on earth did it mean?

He gazed vacantly after Bloxham's retreating form. His mind was getting indurated by these constant shocks. What in heaven's name did it mean?

Was Bloxham fooling him? Or was Bloxham's

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friend Easdaile fooling Bloxham? Or was someone on the boat fooling Easdaile? There was some horrible, grotesque mistake somewhere. But where it came in was quite beyond him. He brooded over the matter, but could make nothing of it.

Bloxham was evidently in sober earnest, and was delighted with the hand he had had in the matter. And his friend Easdaile was evidently in earnest too.

What, in the name of all that was horrible, did it all mean?

He gave it up. He even began to wonder what would happen next, and each day he braced himself up to meet the next blow.

He had not long to wait.

Just one week after Bloxham's curious communication, Ayrton sat at his desk finishing his morning's correspondence.

"That's all just now, Jevons," he said, and his shorthand clerk gathered up his belongings and departed. He reappeared in a moment with a letter.

"Registered letter just come, sir!" he said, and laid it on the desk.

Ayrton glanced at it.

"Leave it," he said curtly, through his clenched teeth, and Jevons disappeared.

Ayrton waited till his footsteps died away down the passage, then he quietly fastened the door, and came back, and stood looking at the letter, with eyes strained and startled, as the rabbit in the serpent's cage looks at the monster which is about to swallow him.

He dropped into his chair. His face was livid to

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the lips, and clench his jaw never so tight he could not keep his mouth from contorting and twisting, in a fashion that spoke of unstrung nerves and bodily weakness.

The letter was in the handwriting of John Brodie. It bore a Ceylon stamp, and was postmarked Colombo. He sat and gazed at it in horror.

Twice he raised his hand toward it, and twice the hand fell to his side before it reached the letter. Should he open it? or should he burn it unopened? No—open it he must. It might—it must—cast some light on the mystery that was driving him crazy.

He staggered to his feet and went to a cupboard and poured out a glass of brandy and drank it off.

Then with nerveless fingers, and a cold spasm of horror, he at last picked up the letter, hurriedly sliced it open, and spread out before him on the desk the thin sheet of foreign paper it contained.

He gripped the arms of his chair, and bent over the desk and read:

"After what occurred at our last interview it is with extreme reluctance that I force myself to write to you. It is likely that after what took place then you have considered the advisability of quitting the country. I forbid you to do so. You will stop where you are and attend to the business of the firm. I require you in London, and I expect you to carry out my instructions to the letter. Any default on your part will be followed by a demand on mine for a settlement in full between us, and the reckoning will be a heavy one.

"JOHN BRODIE."

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Ayrton read the letter twice, slowly and carefully, before any sense of its meaning penetrated his understanding. His brain was numb with the shock of it.

The first reading showed him that the letter was unmistakably in Brodie's writing.

The second time he read it the menace of it struck him blow upon blow, till he bent under it, and sat with his head in his hands utterly overwhelmed and confounded.

Then he started up with a gleam in his eyes. If Brodie wrote that letter—and no other man on earth could have written it—then Brodie was not dead, and he had not killed him, and his soul was not stained with that greatest crime.

But he sank down into his chair again, and the room began to swim slowly round and round. If Brodie was alive—if Brodie wrote that letter—what in heaven's name was it that was sealed up in that case in the Safe Deposit Vaults—sealed up with Brodie's own seal?

Could the dead man have come to life in the night, and forced his way out of the case, and sealed it up and gone on his way, making no sign and leaving him to swelter in the hell he had made for himself? Would to God he could! But it was impossible. What was sealed up by him that night was what was still in the case in the Safe Deposit. For the seal was unbroken, and just as he had left it, and the only seal that could make that impression had been in his possession all that night.

He remembered quite well looking at the seal as the box was carried down into the strong room, and he was familiar with it, and could not be mistaken.

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Then, if Brodie's body was still in the case, how could Brodie write that letter from Colombo, and who else but Brodie could possibly have written it?

It was beyond him! It was Brodie's double, risen up to take vengeance on him.

But what a business-like letter for a ghost to write! Only one man could have written it, and that was John Brodie!

Was it possible the case was not as he left it? Could Brodie have come to life in the Safe Deposit?

There was one thing he could do, and he would do it at once, whatever the result. He would see that case with his own eyes, and compare the seal with the one in the old safe.

He unlocked the safe, groped among Brodie's things for the seal, and put it into his pocket. Then he carefully burnt the letter and the envelope, and jumped into a cab and drove off to Chancery Lane.

Arrived at the Safe Deposit he was courteously received by the son of Anak in charge of the barrier, and escorted by him down the stairs to the office.

"I want Strong-Room No. 905," he said.

"What name, if you please, sir, and your check number?"

"Name, Brodie—check number—I don't remember—did you give me one?"

"About what date did you take the room?"

"About five weeks ago."

The manager turned to his ledger, found the entry, and then swung round:

"Are you Mr. Brodie himself?"

At the unexpected query, and in the instant at his

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disposal, Ayrton tried to fathom the implication of either answer. But the time was too short for him to weigh one against the other. His one idea was to get at the case, and the affirmative seemed the shortest cut to it, so he answered:

"Yes."

But the momentary hesitation was enough for the keen-eyed manager. As courteously as might be, he said:

"I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mr.—Brodie,—but as one of our clients you will, I am sure, appreciate our over-caution even at your own expense. My predecessor lost his post here three weeks ago through neglecting the usual precautions, and that is why I am here. I am sorry, and it may seem ridiculous to you, but I shall have to ask you to identify yourself. One of my clerks shall go with you to your bank, if you wish. It is a mere formality, of course, but our existence depends upon our caution. So you must excuse it."

Ayrton's first impulse was to hit the man, but he saw the absurdity of it, and besides, another son of Anak, twin brother to the guardian of the barrier apparently, stood in the doorway, with a benevolent smile on his face.

It was decidedly awkward. If the bank was requested to specifically identify James Ayrton as John Brodie, they would, to say the least of it, think it curious.

How to get out of the fix now?

A gleam of reason came to him.

"I will call on Monday. I can't wait now. Then your clerk can go with me;" and so into his cab again,

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and back to the City, inwardly raging and fuming, and cursing his own folly in using Brodie's name in the matter at all.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

As his cab turned out of Chancery Lane into Holborn his eye caught the contents bill of an evening paper:

LOSS OF A STEAMER WITH ALL HANDS.

It did not interest him. It needed more than the loss of a steamer, or of a dozen steamers with all hands, to interest him in these times. He was boiling with anger at what had just happened, and his brain was beating like a metronome to the tune of "What does it mean? What does it mean? Is Brodie alive? Who wrote that letter?"

A big *Globe* contents bill came sailing along the street with a yelling small boy hidden behind it, and Ayrton read:

LOSS OF THE "POONAH" WITH ALL HANDS.

Good God! the *Poonah*. That was Brodie's ship! He dashed his hand through the trap and shouted:

"Get me a *Globe*—quick!" and sat with his heart on fire.

The man drew up, whistled to the small boy, who

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sprang on to the step, and shoved the opened sheet into the cab.

"Here y'are, sir. Loss o' ther *Pooner*'n all 'ands! Thank yer, sir!" as Ayrton threw him sixpence and grabbed the paper. "'Ope yer friend aint among 'em, sir!"

"Drive on!" shouted Ayrton, and wrestled with the flapping paper till he found the paragraph.

It was a tersely worded cable from Lloyd's agent at Hong-Kong, and ran thus:

"S. S. *Djellala* arrived to-day, reports terrific cyclone off Annam Coast. Passed large quantities of wreckage of large steamer, life-buoys and boats marked *Poonah*. *Poonah* not been spoken last three days; feared she has sunk with all hands."

He leaned back in his cab with a sigh of relief.

Brodie's ship sunk with all hands! That included Brodie, and he was free. Nothing better could have happened to him. Certainly the big speculation in China would all fall to pieces, and the firm would suffer heavy loss; but that was nothing in comparison with the personal relief which the disappearance of Brodie would afford him.

He would be free now from the torturing worries of the last six weeks, free to devote himself with a single mind to the getting together of a sufficient sum with which to leave the country.

But there!—it all came back upon him with a cold shock. Good heavens! he was arguing on the basis of John Brodie being on the *Poonah*, when, as a matter of fact, his body lay in the Safe Deposit Vaults. Well,

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no matter whether Brodie's body lay below Chancery Lane or beneath the waves of the China Sea, he was done with him, and the mystery that had been like to turn his brain was at an end, and his heart felt lighter than it had done for weeks past.

He bade the man drive to the office of the P. and O. Company, and there, masking his face in a gravity which was so nearly allied to a mad hilarity that he dared not look the clerk in the face lest his eyes should betray him, he inquired for further news of the *Poonah*.

They had none to give. The public were in possession of all the facts. But knowing how anxious Mr. Ayrton must be as to his partner's fate,—Ayrton's lips twitched, but he managed to control them,—they promised that any further news should be forwarded to him at once.

He encountered Bloxham on the street, and Bloxham was desirous of offering his condolences, but Ayrton wrung his hand and said:

"Excuse me, old man, can't stand any more just now;" and hurried away lest he should break out into inextinguishable laughter before his face.

The news had reached the office, and something of the quietude of a house of mourning pervaded it. In speaking to Ayrton the clerks addressed him in the low tones of respectful sympathy.

He ordered the various editions of the *Globe* and *Pall Mall* to be sent in to him as they came out, and the office-boy who brought them in laid them on the table with the manner of one laying wreaths on a grave.

Ayrton read every word of every account, and gath-

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ered comfort and hope from a short leaderette in one of the late editions, which commented on the deadly suddenness and destructiveness of the Eastern cyclones, and held out little hope of any survivors being picked up.

He went to his Club again for the first time in many weeks, ate a hearty dinner, and got a novel enjoyment from the taste of the food, and then went on to his chambers in good spirits.

The incident of the letter he had received in the morning rose up before him now and again like a black cloud on his clearing horizon, but he crushed it down and tried not to think of it. It was too utterly beyond his comprehension. It contained the germs of madness. He would have none of it.

In spite of his still painful thumb he slept better that night.

He bought all the morning papers, but they contained no fresh news. The consensus of opinion was that the last had been heard of the ill-fated *Poonah* and her passengers. So much the better for him. He would gladly—so warped was his mind by the tension and the shocks it had suffered from—have sunk the whole P. and O. fleet to insure the destruction of the writer of that menacing letter, whoever and whatever he was.

In the City he had to accept with grave face the condolences of Brodie's many friends, who each and all felt it incumbent on them to come in and chat over the event, with eulogies of the departed, and urgent advice to Ayrton to keep up his spirits and hope for the best.

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CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS.

DAY after day passed, and each day rendered less and less likely any contradiction of the reported loss of the *Poonah*, and each day Ayrton's spirits rose higher.

He got regular sleep every night now, his health began to improve, and the careworn, harassed look left his face.

His acquaintances spoke highly of the nerve and self-control which carried him so bravely through this trying time—for it was generally recognized that the loss of Brodie would be almost irreparable to the firm.

Then one morning, exactly one week after the reported loss of the *Poonah*, one of the chief clerks from the P. and O. office came bustling and beaming in, with the air of one to whom any lack of the usual observances would be forgiven on account of the importance of the news he bore.

"Great news for you, Mr. Ayrton,—promised to let you know at once,—here it is, just going out to the press," and he handed Ayrton a carbon-copied flimsy.

But the letters swam before Ayrton's eyes. He said hoarsely: "Read it out," and reached for a cigar.

And the chief clerk read:

"Hong Kong—Steamer *Derwent* arrived here this morning, bringing following sole survivors of *Poonah*, foundered in hurricane of January 3. John Brodie, Merchant, London; Isobel Easdaile, Kendal, Eng-

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land; John Stewart, Abel Peters, seamen, and James Death, steward, picked up on life-raft four days ago by *Derwent*. All recovering."

Ayrton steeled himself to shake hands with the chief clerk and thank him.

"Great news," he said, "and I am immensely obliged to you for letting me know," and as soon as he was rid of his visitor, he jumped into a cab and drove off home. In another half hour the news would be generally known. Bloxham and the rest would have come crowding in to overwhelm him with their congratulations, and he felt that his brain could not stand it.

That night was an awful one for him. The specters he had thought laid forever sprang up afresh, and tortured him with tenfold energy. He never closed his eyes, but paced the room like a caged beast all night long. He cursed the *Poonah* and he cursed the *Derwent*. He cursed John Brodie and he cursed himself.

No human brain could stand the terrible strain of this shuttle-cocking between desperate hope and agonizing fear. His whole nervous system seemed suddenly to go to pieces.

In the grim gray of the dawn, he caught sight of his face in the glass and recognized that his time was up—that he could stand no more.

He braced himself with brandy, took pencil and paper and made a few notes, and as soon as a telegraph office was open, sent a wire to his shorthand clerk to come up to him at once.

"I am breaking down, Jevons," he said, when he arrived, "overworked, I suppose. Take down my

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instructions and tell Mr. Sanders to carry them out exactly till I come back. I may be away a week, it may be a month."

He scourged his reeling brain to the task, gave clear and concise directions for the carrying on of the business, forbade any communication with him or the forwarding of any letters or telegrams, save only those from China, which were to be sent up unopened to his rooms, and dismissed the clerk.

Then he carefully packed a small valise, emptied his pockets of papers and letters, and locked up in his small safe every scrap that could give a clew to his identity—told the porter he might be away for a month, and bade him keep carefully any letters that came for him—walked fifty yards down Piccadilly, called a cab, and drove to Paddington, and thence took train to Richmond. There he sought out a certain medical establishment on the hill which he had heard highly spoken of.

He rang the bell and demanded audience of the doctor.

"My name is John Adams," he said. "I have been overworking, and am on the eve of a breakdown. I want you to pull me through. Here is fifty pounds on account. Give me the quietest room in the house, and get me a trained nurse."

The tall, thin, careworn doctor looked at him quietly, felt his pulse, laid a thin, cool hand on his burning forehead, and said, in a thin, gentle voice, "Yes, you are only just in time! You ought to have come to me before. What is the latest drug you have been trying—without effect?"

Ayrton named his latest specialty in soporifics.

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"Aye, aye! Well, get to bed at once, and I will pull you through. Do you want to say anything more to me before you go?"

"Nothing," said Ayrton.

Before nightfall his troubled spirit was fluttering away down toward the gates of death, his body was heaving and straining against the merciful straps that bound him to his bed, and in wild delirium all the pent-up agonies of the last six weeks were pouring out in half-coherent ravings, which, in his right mind, he would have bitten his tongue off sooner than have given utterance to.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANGEL OF LIGHT.

The days ran into weeks, and they tended him carefully and skillfully. And the remote upper room, where, with a premonition of what was before him, Ayrton had insisted on being installed, was filled for days and nights with the creaking and straining of the stout wooden bedstead to which he was bound, and with the wild ravings of his delirium; then,—when his strength was spent and the dividing line between life and death was but a thread,—with the dreadful silence made but the heavier by the sound of the slow, heavy breathing which seemed ever on the point of stopping, but yet went on; and then at last, when the wavering scale turned, with the peace and quiet of slow convalescence.

It was a bright, warm, spring Sunday morning when Ayrton put in his first appearance at the break-

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fast table downstairs. He was woefully wan and thin, —weak in body and broken in spirit, like a mediæval survivor of the rack or the wheel. He dropped into the first vacant chair near the door, and toyed with the food the attendants placed before him, grateful, after his long fight with the shadows, for the sight and sound of his fellows again.

Breakfast was over, but three or four of the inmates lingered at the other end of the table, debating still some question which had evidently been under discussion during the meal, and there was an occasional slight laugh from some of the group.

"Well, but, Miss Boone," said a well-modulated man's voice, in which lurked a suspicion of sarcastic humor, "you don't mean to say you swallow the Bible whole?"

"No," came the reply, in quiet tones, which sounded in Ayrton's ears like a silver bell, "I am no whale. I swallow nothing whole. But I can accept much that I cannot explain. This egg, for instance! I have enjoyed it, but the process of manufacture is beyond me."

"Ah! that's just what stumps me. When I find a flaw in an argument I naturally doubt the whole."

Ayrton recognized the voice now, and the speaker —a well-known Q. C. and Member of Parliament.

"See here now," he went on. "Tell me, Miss Boone, whom did Cain marry?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Ah, well! tell me this! God made the sun and moon on the fourth day of Creation, but the three previous days had both day and night. How was that managed?"

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"I really don't see what it matters whom Cain married, or what kind of light there was during those first three days. It must have been a very glorious light, and it is easy for me to believe that the Maker of sun, moon, and stars could make a light of His own if He needed it."

"Can you explain the mysteries of the New Testament? The Incarnation, the Resurrection, and so on?"

"No, thank God, I cannot! I am grateful that there are still left some things which no one can explain or understand. If I could understand God in full, He would no longer be to me what He is."

She was quite a young girl, not more than nineteen or twenty, Ayrton judged, with delicate, almost transparent, complexion, and large deep-brown eyes. She was dressed in dark blue set off by red ribbons, and was strikingly pretty, though painfully thin both in face and figure.

The quiet, easy, composed way in which she spoke of these matters, not usually made subjects of public discussion, attracted Ayrton's notice, and as he looked at her, and enjoyed looking, she rose suddenly, pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and hurriedly left the room. The rest of the party broke up, the Q. C. saying as he rose:

"I admire enthusiasm, though I never experienced it myself, but hard common sense carries further in this world."

It was so bright and warm that the doctor ordered Ayrton out into the sunshine.

He found himself so weak, however, that his walk extended only as far as the gardens opposite, which

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sloped down to the river and were bathed in sunshine.

He found a secluded seat banked round with rhododendrons, upon which the sun shone full, and here he sat in great content, and gazed out over winding river and distant rolling hills, and drew in health with every delicious breath.

His mind was in much the same state as his body. It too had been sick—sick unto death—but it was recovering tone and strength.

The past with all its horrors was behind, and he resolutely refused to probe into it.

The future? He would face it as resolutely as might be.

During the last ten days, lying prone and helpless in that quiet upper room, he had been alone with his thoughts, and he had had time to think the matter out.

Full of horror and regret for the past, he had decided that what was done could not be undone. He would leave the dead past to bury its dead. All that was left to him was to do whatever duty came to him in the future as resolutely and as manfully as might be. If discovery came, and punishment—well! If not—again well! Whatever came he would face it. One thing only he recoiled from, and that was any further attempt to solve the hideous mystery which his crime had generated. It contained all the possibilities of madness.

He had sinned beyond most men. He had suffered too beyond most. Surely it had not been given to many to suffer torment and torture such as had racked him down to the gates of death.

A light slow footstep came down the wooden steps

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by the side of his seat. It was the young lady of the breakfast table, but at first he hardly recognized her in the uncouth blue poke bonnet she wore. It was hideous enough, but presently it seemed to him that it only heightened the rare delicate sweetness of her face.

This was evidently her favorite seat. At sight of him she stopped and half turned to mount the steps again.

Ayrton rose. "Pray don't let me turn you away from your seat."

"Oh, please don't move. I have no special claim on it," she replied, with a smile that made Ayrton think of wild blush roses.

"Except that of custom perhaps," he said, and then a sudden impulse moved him. "May I speak to you? I heard you at the breakfast table this morning."

"Oh!" said the girl, looking at him, "are you at Dr. Kilgour's, too?"

"I have been there three weeks."

"I don't remember seeing you."

"No, this morning was the first time I have been downstairs. I have been very close to death."

She was still standing, half hesitating.

"Do, pray, sit down," said Ayrton. "If you prefer it I will go."

She sat down, saying, "No, don't go! What did you wish to say to me?"

He sat down too, and remained so long with his eyes fixed apparently on the Surrey hills that the girl looked at him once or twice, and wondered if he had forgotten his last words.

His reticent, self-contained nature found it difficult

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to break the ice. It was only the feeling that he had that this girl was more soul than body that enabled him to do so now.

At last he spoke, and his voice was husky with the weight of his feeling.

"How much shall a man be forgiven?"

The girl's eyes deepened and brightened.

"Until seventy times seven," she answered.

"Aye—trivial faults. But greater sins?"

"Forgiveness has no limits."

"None?"

"None."

"How do you know?"

"Because the God within me tells me so."

"You are a Salvationist?"

"Yes, I am James Boone's daughter, and I am dying. My life may go out like a candle any day. I am waiting for the end."

"And you have no fear?"

"Fear? No. What should I fear?"

Ayrton turned and looked into her eyes, and saw there what he had never seen before—the Perfect Peace. Then his own eyes wandered off to the hills again, and again a great silence fell between them.

And then, in a voice that was barely more than a husky whisper—as a man may confess his sins to God—he said:

"A man slew his friend, without premeditation, yet at the moment with intention. He has suffered all the torments of hell. Can that be forgiven him?"

"Does he seek forgiveness with his whole soul?"

"He does"—the words fell from his lips like a groan.

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"Then even that can be forgiven," and after a pause, the voice like a silver bell went on softly:

"They once brought to the Master for his condemnation one who had broken the law, and whom the law condemned to die. Do you remember what the Master's sentence was? 'Go, sin no more!'"

And again a silence fell between them. But presently she asked:

"Can he—the man you name—atone for his sin in any way?"

"I fear not. No restitution or atonement is possible."

"And he has suffered punishment?"

"Aye! as few men have suffered—but at the hand of God, not of man."

"That is far better. Men are purblind at best. Their punishments always savor of revenge. Dare you tell me more?"

"It is a terrible story!"

"I have heard many."

And presently, in husky, faltering tones, James Ayrton did what he never had expected to do in this world, told the story of his crime, briefly but clearly, and more—did what he had strenuously made up his mind never to do again—laid bare before this sweet-faced, clear-eyed girl the hideous mystery that had sprung out of his crime.

When the story was all told, and he had fallen silent, he felt the clear eyes burning full upon him.

"It is a terrible story," she said; "it is beyond belief almost."

"And yet I have suffered it, and lived through it."

The clear eyes were still upon him.

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"No," he replied to the unspoken question in them. "I am quite sane. It is no hallucination bred of my illness. Would to God it were! It is all exactly as I have told you."

Presently the girl said, "I would like to think upon this matter. I cannot but think there is some great mistake somewhere. But in any case there is no trouble but there is a way out of it. There is no sin too great for forgiveness. The way of redemption may be hard, but there always is a way. What you have told me shall never pass my lips. You trust me?"

"I have trusted you as I never thought to trust anyone," and, standing before her with bowed head, he added, "I thank you for the hope you have given me;" then, with one more look into the great brown eyes, he turned and slowly climbed the steps and went up the path.

He did not see her again that day, and she did not appear at the breakfast table next morning.

When he went into the doctor's study to pay his morning visit, the tall, thin figure seemed to him grimmer and more reserved than ever. The doctor looked him over quietly and said:

"Your walk did you good."

"Yes, doctor, my walk did me good. Where is Miss Boone to-day? I did not see her at breakfast."

The doctor eyed him quietly and then said:

"She is dead. She broke another blood-vessel and died in her sleep."

"Dead! Good God! How terrible! Poor girl!"

"I don't know," said the doctor, very quietly. "I

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doubt if she needs our pity. If ever there was a saint she was one."

"Could I—could I see her, doctor?"

"Why, I didn't know you knew her," with a faint indication of interest.

"Yes, I knew her," said Ayrton.

He was allowed to see her, and the sweet white face, placid and beautiful as the face of a sleeping angel, remained in his memory and brought to him a perpetual message of forgiveness and hope.

He kissed the smooth brow and went his way.

CHAPTER X.

BRODIE WANTS HIS BODY.

A WEEK later Ayrton returned to town to pick up the tangled threads of his life, and to make the best he could out of it.

He found a number of letters at his chambers, and among them two in the handwriting of John Brodie, one postmarked Singapore, the other Hong-Kong.

His heart surged and swelled painfully at sight of them, but he braced himself to open and read them.

They dealt entirely with business matters and made no reference to the past. Certain changes in the arrangements made before Brodie's departure were insisted on, and instructions laid down as to their carrying out. The end and aim of them all were to emphasize the fact that London would in future be entirely subordinate to, and dependent on, the Chinese branch of the business. In each letter the writer

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signed himself simply "John Brodie," but in the left-hand corner of each, at the foot of the page, was the word "Remember."

Was he likely to forget?

However, his mind was made up to keep that page in his life turned down, and he strove with all his new powers to keep his mind off the great enigma.

There was a foreign paper with a Chinese stamp on. He listlessly tore off the wrapper and glanced at the contents. He had not to look far for the reason of its being sent to him.

The heading in large type caught his eye:

"THE SURVIVORS OF THE 'POONAH.'
THRILLING NARRATIVES. ROMANTIC SEQUEL. MARRIAGE OF MR. BRODIE AND MISS EASDAILE;"

and there followed a full account of the wedding at the British Consulate, with the names of all the British residents who had been present. There could be no doubt about it. It was published abroad to the whole world, as plainly as print could make it, that John Brodie had survived the disastrous wreck, and had married the only lady who had been saved.

Ayrton read all the details with apathetic amazement. John Brodie sailed, got wrecked, was saved, got married, and all the while his body lay securely sealed up in a case in the Safe Deposit Vaults.

It was beyond belief—yet there it was. To dwell upon it meant madness, so he quietly accepted the facts as the world accepted them, and turned resolutely to the work that lay to his hand.

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And so the days crept on, burdened with the horror of this unsolved mystery of life and death, and the weeks became months, and James Ayrton worked early and late with one sole end in view—that of gathering together enough capital to make a fresh start in a new world.

Brodie wrote regularly by each mail, terse business letters, to which Ayrton replied in kind. The great speculation had proved a triumphant success, but none of the profits were remitted to England, and the London office simply acted on orders received from China and sank into the second place.

Ayrton stuck doggedly to his post, and bore his woeful burden with such grim equanimity as he could muster.

It was appalling even to himself at times to find himself sitting at his desk reading Brodie's letters and answering them, and knowing all the time that Brodie had, beyond all doubt, died by his hand that night nearly twelve months ago.

At times he tried to cheat himself into the belief that the whole matter was after all a horrible hallucination, as that girl at Richmond had told him it must be. But he had only to unlock the old safe behind him, and he did it more than once, and to view the battered relics it contained, to assure himself of the reality of the matter.

At times the torture of doubt became so excruciating that even the fell certainty gave relief. And more than once he was driven to the point of attempting once more to recover possession of the case from the Safe Deposit people, in order to solve the doubts that wore his life thin.

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The flight of time was emphasized by the arrival of a newspaper from China, which announced the birth of a son to John Brodie at Shanghai.

Then came two startling events, following close one after the other, which stirred up within him all those fears which had gradually quieted down during the past uneventful months, and drove him at last to decisive action.

The first was a letter from Brodie, which ran thus, and Ayrton's hair bristled at the roots as he read it:

"You will please send out to me by first steamer the case marked J. B. *22,222*, which contains my"—(a word had been erased here, and over it had been written "books,"—but to Ayrton's horrified eyes the under word was clearly visible—it was "body.")

He rubbed his eyes, and gazed at it long and fixedly, and the horrors and terrors of those first few weeks came back upon him with all their force.

What in the name of all that was horrible could this re-incarnate John Brodie want with the other John Brodie's body?

There was only one conclusion possible. The fictitious John Brodie was so well satisfied with his position that he wanted to consolidate it, and to make sure of never being ousted from it by the sudden and unexpected coming to light of the real John Brodie's body.

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CHAPTER XI.

AN ANGEL OF ANOTHER COLOR.

AYRTON pondered the matter gloomily for a time, then suddenly it flashed into his mind that here was the way to obtain from the Safe Deposit people the case which he had been unable to get possession of the last time he tried.

He still saw difficulties, but his brain was already planning how to overcome them.

He could not go in person for the case. If the Safe Deposit officials again requested his identification as John Brodie, he would be in exactly the same predicament as before. He bitterly regretted the shortsightedness which had caused him in the first instance, when depositing the case, to give Brodie's name instead of his own.

As he could not go himself he must send someone else, and to fully justify his not appearing in person he must be out of the country.

He decided to take a run over to Wilhelmsbad for his health, and from there to send Brodie's letter and the key of the Safe Deposit Vault to his head clerk, with full instructions how to act in the matter.

Where to have the case taken to was the next thing to be decided. It would never do to have it taken to the office. That meddlesome old ruffian Jenks would certainly be delving into it to see how the governor's books were getting on.

He determined to take a cottage for the season somewhere up the river, in as lonely a situation as

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could be found. He would have the case sent there, and then if possible would bring himself to the task of burying out of sight forever the hideous evidence of his crime.

He put the matter in hand at once, and within a week was in possession of a tiny furnished house not far from Chertsey, and within a few minutes' walk of the river. It was old-fashioned and cramped, and correspondingly uncomfortable and inconvenient, but it stood all by itself, and it possessed a garden large enough to bury a regiment in.

He took the house in the name of John Adams, paid three months' rent in advance, and arranged with an old lady from the village to come in and "do for him," whenever he chose to come from Saturday to Monday, and to keep an eye on the place meanwhile, with a view to its being ready for him to run down to at any odd time when the fancy took him.

The old body was at great pains to explain and apologize for her not being able to sleep at the cottage or to give her whole time to him, as she had her own old man to look after, and as he was an invalid she could not leave him altogether.

"If anything happens to my old man," she said cheerfully, "I'll come in and take care of you all the time, but so long as he's above ground I'm bound to do what I can for him, though he be somewhat of a trial at times."

Ayrton assured her that the arrangement would suit him perfectly, as he was accustomed to live alone; and he fervently wished the old man a long and happy life.

The arrangements for his trip abroad were soon

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