NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07607374 5

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"When the woman raised her arms in a peculiar fashion, the shadow on the blind was remarkably like that of a bat"

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BAT WING

By
SAX ROHMER

McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE
NEW YORK

[1921]

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
208028B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1942 L

Replacing missing copy
13 4 33 &H

COPYRIGHT, 1921 BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THAT OF TRANSLATION
INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE SCANDINAVIAN

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	PAUL HARLEY OF CHANCERY LANE .	3
II.	THE VOODOO SWAMP	17
III.	THE VAMPIRE BAT	31
IV.	CRAY'S FOLLY	38
V.	VAL BEVERLEY	46
VI.	THE BARRIER	56
VII.	AT THE LAVENDER ARMS	64
VIII.	THE CALL OF M'KOMBO	73
IX.	OBEAH	87
X.	THE NIGHT WALKER	95
XI.	THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND . . .	111
XII.	MORNING MISTS	121
XIII.	AT THE GUEST HOUSE	129
XIV.	YSOLA CAMBER	140
XV.	UNREST	151
XVI.	RED EVE	157
XVII.	NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON . . .	167
XVIII.	INSPECTOR AYLESBURY OF MARKET HILTON	176

Digitized by Google 42K960 Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	COMPLICATIONS	185
XX.	A SPANISH CIGARETTE	197
XXI.	THE WING OF A BAT	207
XXII.	COLIN CAMBER'S SECRET	215
XXIII.	INSPECTOR AYLESBURY CROSS-EXAMINES	223
XXIV.	AN OFFICIAL MOVE	234
XXV.	AYLESBURY'S THEORY	242
XXVI.	IN MADAME'S ROOM	250
XXVII.	AN INSPIRATION	259
XXVIII.	MY THEORY OF THE CRIME	264
XXIX.	A LEE-ENFIELD RIFLE	272
XXX.	THE SEVENTH YEW TREE	279
XXXI.	YSOLA CAMBER'S CONFESSION	287
XXXII.	PAUL HARLEY'S EXPERIMENT	299
XXXIII.	PAUL HARLEY'S EXPERIMENT CONCLUDED	311
XXXIV.	THE CREEPING SICKNESS	317
XXXV.	AN AFTERWORD	332

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BAT WING

CHAPTER I

PAUL HARLEY OF CHANCERY LANE

TOWARD the hour of six on a hot summer's evening Mr. Paul Harley was seated in his private office in Chancery Lane reading through a number of letters which Innes, his secretary, had placed before him for signature. Only one more remained to be passed, but it was a long, confidential report upon a certain matter, which Harley had prepared for His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. He glanced with a sigh of weariness at the little clock upon his table before commencing to read.

"Shall detain you only a few minutes, now, Knox," he said.

I nodded, smiling. I was quite content to sit and watch my friend at work.

Paul Harley occupied a unique place in the maelstrom of vice and ambition which is sometimes called London life. Whilst at present he held no official post, some of the most momentous problems of British policy during the past five years, problems imperilling interstate relationships and not infrequently threatening a renewal of the world war, had owed their solution to the peculiar genius of this man.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

No clue to his profession appeared upon the plain brass plate attached to his door, and little did those who regarded Paul Harley merely as a successful private detective suspect that he was in the confidence of some who guided the destinies of the Empire. Paul Harley's work in Constantinople during the feverish months preceding hostilities with Turkey, although unknown to the general public, had been of a most extraordinary nature. His recommendations were never adopted, unfortunately. Otherwise, the tragedy of the Dardanelles might have been averted.

His surroundings as he sat there, gaze bent upon the typewritten pages, were those of any other professional man. So it would have seemed to the casual observer. But perhaps there was a quality in the atmosphere of the office which would have told a more sensitive visitor that it was the apartment of no ordinary man of business. Whilst there were filing cabinets and bookshelves laden with works of reference, many of them legal, a large and handsome Burmese cabinet struck an unexpected note.

On closer inspection, other splashes of significant colour must have been detected in the scheme, notably a very fine engraving of Edgar Allan Poe, from the daguerreotype of 1848; and upon the man himself lay the indelible mark of the tropics. His clean-cut features had that hint of underlying bronze which tells of years spent beneath a merciless sun, and the touch of gray at his temples only added to the eager, almost fierce vitality of the dark face. Paul Harley was notable because of that intellectual strength which does not strike one immediately, since it is purely temperamental, but which, nevertheless, invests its possessor with an aura of distinction.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Writing his name at the bottom of the report, Paul Harley enclosed the pages in a long envelope and dropped the envelope into a basket which contained a number of other letters. His work for the day was ended, and glancing at me with a triumphant smile, he stood up. His office was a part of a residential suite, but although, like some old-time burgher of the city, he lived on the premises, the shutting of a door which led to his private rooms marked the close of the business day. Pressing a bell which connected with the public office occupied by his secretary, Paul Harley stood up as Innes entered.

"There's nothing further, is there, Innes?" he asked.

"Nothing, Mr. Harley, if you have passed the Home Office report?"

Paul Harley laughed shortly.

"There it is," he replied, pointing to the basket; "a tedious and thankless job, Innes. It is the fifth draft you have prepared and it will have to do."

He took up a letter which lay unsealed upon the table. "This is the Rokeby affair," he said. "I have decided to hold it over, after all, until my return."

"Ah!" said Innes, quietly glancing at each envelope as he took it from the basket. "I see you have turned down the little job offered by the Marquis."

"I have," replied Harley, smiling grimly, "and a fee of five hundred guineas with it. I have also intimated to that distressed nobleman that this is a business office and that a laundry is the proper place to take his dirty linen. No, there's nothing further to-night, Innes. You can get along now. Has Miss Smith gone?"

But as if in answer to his enquiry the typist, who with Innes made up the entire staff of the office, came in at that moment, a card in her hand. Harley glanced

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

across in my direction and then at the card, with a wry expression.

"Colonel Juan Menendez," he read aloud, "Cavendish Club," and glanced reflectively at Innes. "Do we know the Colonel?"

"I think not," answered Innes; "the name is unfamiliar to me."

"I wonder," murmured Harley. He glanced across at me. "It's an awful nuisance, Knox, but just as I thought the decks were clear. Is it something really interesting, or does he want a woman watched? However, his name sounds piquant, so perhaps I had better see him. Ask him to come in, Miss Smith."

Innes and Miss Smith retiring, there presently entered a man of most striking and unusual presence. In the first place, Colonel Menendez must have stood fully six feet in his boots, and he carried himself like a grandee of the golden days of Spain. His complexion was extraordinarily dusky, whilst his hair, which was close cropped, was iron gray. His heavy eyebrows and curling moustache with its little points were equally black, so that his large teeth gleamed very fiercely when he smiled. His eyes were large, dark, and brilliant, and although he wore an admirably cut tweed suit, for some reason I pictured him as habitually wearing riding kit. Indeed I almost seemed to hear the jingle of his spurs.

He carried an ebony cane for which I mentally substituted a crop, and his black derby hat I thought hardly as suitable as a sombrero. His age might have been anything between fifty and fifty-five.

Standing in the doorway he bowed, and if his smile was Mephistophelean, there was much about Colonel Juan Menendez which commanded respect.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Mr. Harley," he began, and his high, thin voice afforded yet another surprise, "I feel somewhat ill at ease to—how do you say it?—appropriate your time, as I am by no means sure that what I have to say justifies my doing so."

He spoke most fluent, indeed florid, English. But his sentences at times were oddly constructed; yet, save for a faint accent, and his frequent interpolation of such expressions as "how do you say?"—a sort of nervous mannerism—one might have supposed him to be a Britisher who had lived much abroad. I formed the opinion that he had read extensively, and this, as I learned later, was indeed the case.

"Sit down, Colonel Menendez," said Harley with quiet geniality. "Officially, my working day is ended, I admit, but if you have no objection to the presence of my friend, Mr. Knox, I shall be most happy to chat with you."

He smiled in a way all his own.

"If your business is of a painfully professional nature," he added, "I must beg you to excuse me for fourteen days, as I am taking a badly needed holiday with my friend."

"Ah, is it so?" replied the Colonel, placing his hat and cane upon the table, and sitting down rather wearily in a big leathern armchair which Harley had pushed forward. "If I intrude I am sorry, but indeed my business is urgent, and I come to you on the recommendation of my friend, Señor Don Merry del Val, the Spanish Ambassador."

He raised his eyes to Harley's face with an expression of peculiar appeal. I rose to depart, but:

"Sit down, Knox," said Harley, and turned again to the visitor. "Please proceed," he requested. "Mr.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Knox has been with me in some of the most delicate cases which I have ever handled, and you may rely upon his discretion as you may rely upon mine." He pushed forward a box of cigars. "Will you smoke?"

"Thanks, no," was the answer; "you see, I rarely smoke anything but my cigarettes."

Colonel Menendez extracted a slip of rice paper from a little packet which he carried, next, dipping two long, yellow fingers into his coat pocket, he brought out a portion of tobacco, laid it in the paper, and almost in the twinkling of an eye had made, rolled, and lighted a very creditable cigarette. His dexterity was astonishing, and seeing my surprise he raised his heavy eyebrows, and:

"Practice makes perfect, is it not said?" he remarked.

He shrugged his shoulders and dropped the extinguished match in an ash tray, whilst I studied him with increasing interest. Some dread, real or imaginary, was oppressing the man's mind, I mused. I felt my presence to be unwelcome, but:

"Very well," he began, suddenly. "I expect, Mr. Harley, that you will be disposed to regard what I have to tell you rather as a symptom of what you call nerves than as evidence of any agency directed against me."

Paul Harley stared curiously at the speaker. "Do I understand you to suspect that someone is desirous of harming you?" he enquired.

Colonel Menendez slowly nodded his head.

"Such is my meaning," he replied.

"You refer to bodily harm?"

"But yes, emphatically."

"Hm," said Harley; and taking out a tin of tobacco from a cabinet beside him he began in leisurely manner

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

to load a briar. "No doubt you have good reasons for this suspicion?"

"If I had not good reasons, Mr. Harley, nothing could have induced me to trouble you. Yet, even now that I have compelled myself to come here, I find it difficult, almost impossible, to explain those reasons to you."

An expression of embarrassment appeared upon the brown face, and now Colonel Menendez paused and was plainly at a loss for words with which to continue.

Harley replaced the tin in the cupboard and struck a match. Lighting his pipe he nodded good humouredly as if to say, "I quite understand." As a matter of fact, he probably thought, as I did, that this was a familiar case of a man of possibly blameless life who had become subject to that delusion which leads people to believe themselves threatened by mysterious and unnameable danger.

Our visitor inhaled deeply.

"You, of course, are waiting for the facts," he presently resumed, speaking with a slowness which told of a mind labouring for the right mode of expression. "These are so scanty, I fear, of so, shall I say, phantom a kind, that even when they are in your possession you will consider me to be merely the victim of a delusion. In the first place, then, I have reason to believe that someone followed me from my home to your office."

"Indeed," said Paul Harley, sympathetically, for this I perceived was exactly what he had anticipated, and merely tended to confirm his suspicion. "Some member of your household?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you actually see this follower?"

"My dear sir," cried Colonel Menendez, excitement

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

emphasizing his accent, "if I had seen him, so much would have been made clear, so much! I have never seen him, but I have heard him and felt him—felt his presence, I mean."

"In what way?" asked Harley, leaning back in his chair and studying the fierce face.

"On several occasions on turning out the light in my bedroom and looking across the lawn from my window I have observed the shadow of someone—how do you say?—lurking in the garden."

"The shadow?"

"Precisely. The person himself was concealed beneath a tree. When he moved his shadow was visible on the ground."

"You were not deceived by a waving branch?"

"Certainly not. I speak of a still, moonlight night."

"Possibly, then, it was the shadow of a tramp," suggested Harley. "I gather that you refer to a house in the country?"

"It was not," declared Colonel Menendez, emphatically; "it was not. I wish to God I could believe it had been. Then there was, a month ago, an attempt to enter my house."

Paul Harley exhibited evidence of a quickening curiosity. He had perceived, as I had perceived, that the manner of the speaker differed from that of the ordinary victim of delusion, with whom he had become professionally familiar.

"You had actual evidence of this?" he suggested.

"It was due to insomnia, sleeplessness, brought about, yes, I will admit it, by apprehension, that I heard the footsteps of this intruder."

"But you did not see him?"

"Only his shadow."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"What!"

"You can obtain the evidence of all my household that someone had actually entered," declared Colonel Menendez, eagerly. "Of this, at least, I can give you the certain facts. Whoever it was had obtained access through a kitchen window, had forced two locks, and was coming stealthily along the hallway when the sound of his footsteps attracted my attention."

"What did you do?"

"I came out on to the landing and looked down the stairs. But even the slight sound which I made had been sufficient to alarm the midnight visitor, for I had never a glimpse of him. Only, as he went swiftly back in the direction from which he had come, the moonlight shining in through a window in the hall cast his shadow on the carpet."

"Strange," murmured Harley. "Very strange, indeed. The shadow told you nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

Colonel Menendez hesitated momentarily, and glanced swiftly across at Harley.

"It was just a vague—do you say blur?—and then it was gone. But——"

"Yes," said Harley. "But?"

"Ah," Colonel Menendez blew a cloud of smoke into the air, "I come now to the matter which I find so hard to explain."

He inhaled again deeply and was silent for a while.

"Nothing was stolen?" asked Harley.

"Nothing whatever."

"And no clue was left behind?"

"No clue except the filed fastening of a window and two open doors which had been locked as usual when the household retired."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Hm," mused Harley again;" this incident, of course, may have been an isolated one and in no way connected with the surveillance of which you complain. I mean that this person who undoubtedly entered your house might prove to be an ordinary burglar."

"On a table in the hallway of Cray's Folly," replied Colonel Menendez, impressively—"so my house is named—stands a case containing presentation gold plate. The moonlight of which I have spoken was shining fully upon this case, and does the burglar live who will pass such a prize and leave it untouched?"

"I quite agree," said Harley, quietly, "that this is a very big point."

"You are beginning at last," suggested the Colonel, "to believe that my suspicions are not quite groundless?"

"There is a distinct possibility that they are more than suspicions," agreed Harley; "but may I suggest that there is something else? Have you an enemy?"

"Who that has ever held public office is without enemies?"

"Ah, quitę so. Then I suggest again that there is something else."

He gazed keenly at his visitor, and the latter, whilst meeting the look unflinchingly with his large dark eyes, was unable to conceal the fact that he had received a home thrust.

"There are two points, Mr. Harley," he finally confessed, "almost certainly associated one with the other, if you understand, but both these so—shall I say remote?—from my life, that I hesitate to mention them. It seems fantastic to suppose that they contain a clue."

"I beg of you," said Harley, "to keep nothing back, however remote it may appear to be. It is sometimes

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the seemingly remote things which prove upon investigation to be the most intimate."

"Very well," resumed Colonel Menendez, beginning to roll a second cigarette whilst continuing to smoke the first, "I know that you are right, of course, but it is nevertheless very difficult for me to explain. I mentioned the attempted burglary, if so I may term it, in order to clear your mind of the idea that my fears were a myth. The next point which I have concerns a man, a neighbour of mine in Surrey. Before I proceed I should like to make it clear that I do not believe for a moment that he is responsible for this unpleasant business."

Harley stared at him curiously. "Nevertheless," he said, "there must be some data in your possession which suggest to your mind that he has some connection with it."

"There are, Mr. Harley, but they belong to things so mystic and far away from ordinary crime that I fear you will think me," he shrugged his great shoulders, "a man haunted by strange superstitions. Do you say 'haunted?' Good. You understand. I should tell you, then, that although of pure Spanish blood, I was born in Cuba. The greater part of my life has been spent in the West Indies, where prior to '98 I held an appointment under the Spanish Government. I have property, not only in Cuba, but in some of the smaller islands which formerly were Spanish, and I shall not conceal from you that during the latter years of my administration I incurred the enmity of a section of the population. Do I make myself clear?"

Paul Harley nodded and exchanged a swift glance with me. I formed a rapid mental picture of native life under the governorship of Colonel Juan Menendez.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

and I began to consider his story from a new viewpoint. Seemingly rendered restless by his reflections, he stood up and began to pace the floor, a tall but curiously graceful figure. I noticed the bulldog tenacity of his chin, the intense pride in his bearing, and I wondered what kind of menace had induced him to seek the aid of Paul Harley; for whatever his failings might be, and I could guess at the nature of several of them, that this thin-lipped Spanish soldier knew the meaning of fear I was not prepared to believe.

"Before you proceed further, Colonel Menendez," said Harley, "might I ask when you left Cuba?"

"Some three years ago," was his reply. "Because—" he hesitated curiously—"of health motives, I leased a property in England, believing that here I should find peace."

"In other words, you were afraid of something or someone in Cuba?"

Colonel Menendez turned in á flash, glaring down at the speaker.

"I never feared any man in my life, Mr. Harley," he said, coldly.

"Then why are you here?"

The Colonel placed the stump of his first cigarette in an ash tray and lighted that which he had newly made.

"It is true," he admitted. "Forgive me. Yet what I said was that I never feared any *man*."

He stood squarely in front of the Burmese cabinet, resting one hand upon his hip. Then he added a remark which surprised me.

"Do you know anything of Voodoo?" he asked.

Paul Harley took his pipe from between his teeth and stared at the speaker silently for a moment. "Voodoo?" he echoed. "You mean negro magic?"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Exactly."

"My studies have certainly not embraced it," replied Harley, quietly, "nor has it hitherto come within my experience. But since I have lived much in the East, I am prepared to learn that Voodoo may not be a negligible quantity. There are forces at work in India which we in England improperly understand. The same may be true of Cuba."

"The same *is* true of Cuba."

Colonel Menendez glared almost fiercely across the room at Paul Harley.

"And do I understand," asked the latter, "that the danger which you believe to threaten you is associated with Cuba?"

"That, Mr. Harley, is for you to decide when all the facts shall be in your possession. Do you wish that I proceed?"

"By all means. I must confess that I am intensely interested."

"Very well, Mr. Harley. I have something to show you."

From an inside breast pocket Colonel Menendez drew out a gold-mounted case, and from the case took some flat, irregularly shaped object wrapped in a piece of tissue paper. Unfolding the paper, he strode across and laid the object which it had contained upon the blotting pad in front of my friend.

Impelled by curiosity I stood up and advanced to inspect it. It was of a dirty brown colour, some five or six inches long, and appeared to consist of a kind of membrane. Harley, his elbow on the table, was staring down at it questioningly.

"What is it?" I said; "some kind of leaf?"

"No," replied Harley, looking up into the dark

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

face of the Spanish colonel; "I think I know what it is."

"I, also, know what it is," declared Colonel Menendez, grimly. "But tell me what to you it seems like, Mr. Harley?"

Paul Harley's expression was compounded of incredulity, wonder, and something else, as, continuing to stare at the speaker, he replied:

"It is the wing of a bat."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER II

THE VOODOO SWAMP

OFTEN enough my memory has recaptured that moment in Paul Harley's office, when Harley, myself, and the tall Spaniard stood looking down at the bat wing lying upon the blotting pad.

My brilliant friend at times displayed a sort of prescience, of which I may have occasion to speak later, but I, together with the rest of pur-blind humanity, am commonly immune from the prophetic instinct. Therefore I chronicle the fact for what it may be worth, that as I gazed with a sort of disgust at the exhibit lying upon the table I became possessed of a conviction, which had no logical basis, that a door had been opened through which I should step into a new avenue of being; I felt myself to stand upon the threshold of things strange and terrible, but withal alluring. Perhaps it is true that in the great crises of life the inner eye becomes momentarily opened.

With intense curiosity I awaited the Colonel's next words, but, a cigarette held nervously between his fingers, he stood staring at Harley, and it was the latter who broke that peculiar silence which had fallen upon us.

"The wing of a bat," he murmured, then touched it gingerly. "Of what kind of bat, Colonel Menendez? Surely not a British species?"

"But emphatically not a British species," replied

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the Spaniard. "Yet even so the matter would be strange."

"I am all anxiety to learn the remainder of your story, Colonel Menendez."

"Good. Your interest comforts me very greatly, Mr. Harley. But when first I came, you led me to suppose that you were departing from London?"

"Such, at the time, was my intention, sir." Paul Harley smiled slightly. "Accompanied by my friend, Mr. Knox, I had proposed to indulge in a fortnight's fishing upon the Norfolk Broads."

"Fishing?"

"Yes."

"A peaceful occupation, Mr. Harley, and a great rest-cure for one who like yourself moves much amid the fiercer passions of life. You were about to make holiday?"

Paul Harley nodded.

"It is cruel of me to intrude upon such plans," continued Colonel Menendez, dexterously rolling his cigarette around between his fingers. "Yet because of my urgent need I dare to do so. Would yourself and your friend honour me with your company at Cray's Folly for a few days? I can promise you good entertainment, although I regret that there is no fishing; but it may chance that there will be other and more exciting sport."

Harley glanced at me significantly.

"Do I understand you to mean, Colonel Menendez," he asked, "that you have reason to believe that this conspiracy directed against you is about to come to a head?"

Colonel Menendez nodded, at the same time bringing his hand down sharply upon the table.

"Mr. Harley," he replied, his high, thin voice sunken

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

almost to a whisper, "Wednesday night is the night of the full moon."

"The full moon?"

"It is at the full moon that the danger comes."

Paul Harley stood up, and watched by the Spanish colonel paced slowly across the office. At the outer door he paused and turned.

"Colonel Menendez," he said, "that you would willingly waste the time of a busy man I do not for a moment believe, therefore I shall ask you as briefly as possible to state your case in detail. When I have heard it, if it appears to me that any good purpose can be served by my friend and myself coming to Cray's Folly I feel sure that he will be happy to accept your proffered hospitality."

"If I am likely to be of the slightest use I shall be delighted," said I, which indeed was perfectly true.

Whilst I had willingly agreed to accompany Harley to Norfolk I had none of his passion for the piscatorial art, and the promise of novel excitement held out by Colonel Menendez appealed to me more keenly than the lazy days upon the roads which Harley loved.

"Gentlemen"—the Colonel bowed profoundly—"I am honoured and delighted. When you shall have heard my story I know what your decision will be."

He resumed his seat, and began, it seemed almost automatically, to roll a fresh cigarette.

"I am all attention," declared Harley, and his glance strayed again in a wondering fashion to the bat wing lying on his table.

"I will speak briefly," resumed our visitor, "and any details which may seem to you to be important can be discussed later when you are my guests. You must know then that I first became acquainted with the

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

significance belonging to the term 'Bat Wing' and to the object itself some twenty years ago."

"But surely," interrupted Harley, incredulously, "you are not going to tell me that the menace of which you complain is of twenty years' standing?"

"At your express request, Mr. Harley," returned the Colonel a trifle brusquely, "I am dealing with possibilities which are remote, because in your own words it is sometimes the remote which proves to be the intimate. It was then rather more than twenty years ago, at a time when great political changes were taking place in the West Indies, that my business interests, which are mainly concerned with sugar, carried me to one of the smaller islands which had formerly been under—my jurisdiction, do you say? Here I had a house and estate, and here in the past I had experienced much trouble with the natives.

"I do not disguise from you that I was unpopular, and on my return I met with unmistakable signs of hostility. My native workmen were insubordinate. In fact, it was the reports from my overseers which had led me to visit the island. I made a tour of the place, believing it to be necessary to my interests that I should get once more in touch with negro feeling, since I had retired to my home in Cuba after the upheavals in '98. Very well.

"The manager of my estate, a capable man, was of opinion that there existed a secret organization amongst the native labourers operating—you understand?—against my interests. He produced certain evidences of this. They were not convincing; and all my enquiries and examinations of certain inhabitants led to no definite results. Yet I grew more and more to feel that enemies surrounded me."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He paused to light his third cigarette, and whilst he did so I conjured up a mental picture of his "examinations of certain inhabitants." I recalled hazily those stories of Spanish mismanagement and cruelty which had directly led to United States interferences in the islands. But whilst I could well believe that this man's life had not been safe in those bad old days in the West Indies, I found it difficult to suppose that a native plot against his safety could have survived for more than twenty years and have come to a climax in England. However, I realized that there was more to follow, and presently, having lighted his cigarette, the Colonel resumed:

"In the neighbourhood of the hacienda which had once been my official residence there was a belt of low-lying pest country—you understand pest country?—which was a hot-bed of poisonous diseases. It followed the winding course of a nearly stagnant creek. From the earliest times the Black Belt—it was so called—had been avoided by European inhabitants, and indeed by the coloured population as well. Apart from the malaria of the swampy ground it was infested with reptiles and with poisonous insects of a greater variety and of a more venomous character than I have ever known in any part of the world.

"I must explain that what I regarded as a weak point in my manager's theory was this: Whilst he held that the native labourers to a man were linked together under some head, or guiding influence, he had never succeeded in surprising anything in the nature of a negro meeting. Indeed, he had prohibited all gatherings of this kind. His answer to my criticism was a curious one. He declared that the members of this mysterious society met and received their instructions

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

at some place within the poison area to which I have referred, believing themselves there to be safe from European interference.

"For a long time I disputed this with poor Valera—for such was my manager's name; when one night as I was dismounting from my horse before the veranda, having returned from a long ride around the estate, a shot was fired from the border of the Black Belt which at one point crept up dangerously close to the hacienda.

"The shot was a good one. I had caught my spur in the stirrup in dismounting, and stumbled. Otherwise I must have been a dead man. The bullet pierced the crown of my hat, only missing my skull by an inch or less. The alarm was given. But no search-party could be mustered, do you say?—which was prepared to explore the poison swamp—or so declared my native servants. Valera, however, seized upon this incident to illustrate his theory that there were those in the island who did not hesitate to enter the Black Belt popularly supposed to cast up noxious vapours at dusk of a sort fatal to any traveller.

"That night over our wine we discussed the situation, and he pointed out to me that now was the hour to test his theory. Orders had evidently been given for my assassination and the attempt had failed.

"'There will be a meeting,' said Valera, 'to discuss the next move. And it will take place to-morrow night!'

"I challenged him with a glance and I replied:

"'To-morrow night is a full moon, and if you are agreeable we will make a secret expedition into the swamp, and endeavour to find the clearing which you say is there, and which you believe to be the rendezvous of the conspirators.'

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Even in the light of the lamp I saw Valera turn pale, but he was a Spaniard and a man of courage.

"'I agree, señor,' he replied. 'If my information is correct we shall find the way.'

"I must explain that the information to which he referred had been supplied by a native girl who loved him. That this clearing was a meeting-place she had denied. But she had admitted that it was possible to obtain access to it, and had even described the path." He paused. "She died of a lingering sickness."

Colonel Menendez spoke these last words with great deliberation and treated each of us to a long and significant stare.

"Presently," he added, "I will tell you what was nailed to the wall of her hut on the night that she fell ill. But to continue my narrative. On the following evening, suitably equipped, Valera and myself set out, leaving by a side door and striking into the woods at a point east of the hacienda, where, according to his information, a footpath existed, which would lead us to the clearing we desired to visit. Of that journey, gentlemen, I have most terrible memories.

"Imagine a dense and poisonous jungle, carpeted by rotten vegetation in which one's feet sank deeply and from which arose a visible and stenching vapour. Imagine living things, slimy things, moving beneath the tread, sometimes coiling about our riding boots, sometimes making hissing sounds. Imagine places where the path was overgrown, and we must thrust our way through bushes where great bloated spiders weaved their webs, where clammy night things touched us as we passed, where unfamiliar and venomous insects clung to our garments.

"We proceeded onward for more than half an hour

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

guided by the moonlight, but this, although tropically brilliant, at some places scarcely penetrated the thick vapour which arose from the jungle. In those days I was a young and vigorous man; my companion was several years my senior; and his sufferings were far greater than my own. But if the jungle was horrible, worse was yet to come.

"Presently we stumbled upon an open space almost quite bare of vegetation, a poisonous green carpet spread in the heart of the woods. Here the vapour was more dense than ever, but I welcomed the sight of open ground after the reptile-infested thicket. Alas! it was a snare, a death-trap, a sort of morass, in which we sank up to our knees. Pah! it was filthy—vile! And I became aware of great—lassitude, do you say?—whilst Valera's panting breath told that he had almost reached the end of his resources.

"A faint breeze moved through the clearing and for a few moments we were enabled to perceive one another more distinctly. I uttered an exclamation of horror.

"My companion's garments were a mass of strange-looking patches.

"Even as I noticed them I glanced rapidly down—and found myself in similar condition. As I did so one of these patches upon the sleeve of my tunic intruded coldly upon my bare wrist. At that I cried out aloud in fear. Valera and I commenced what was literally a fight for life.

"Gentlemen, we were attacked by some kind of blood-red leeches, which came out of the slime! In detaching them one detached patches of skin, and they swarmed over our bodies like ants upon carrion.

"They penetrated beneath our garments, these swollen, lustful, unclean things; and it was whilst we

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

staggered on through the swamp in agony of mind and body that we saw the light of many torches amid the trees ahead of us, and in their smoky glare witnessed the flight of hundreds of bats. The moonlight creeping dimly through the mist, and the torchlight—how do you say?—enflaming the vegetation, created a scene like that of Inferno, in which naked figures danced wildly, uttering animal cries.

"Above the shrieking and howling, which rose and fell in a sort of unholy chorus, I heard one long, wailing sound, repeated and repeated. It was an African word. But I knew its meaning.

"It was '*Bat Wing!*'

"My doubts were dispersed. This was a meeting-place of Devil-worshippers, or devotees of the cult of Voodoo! One man only could I see clearly so as to remember him, a big negro employed upon one of my estates. He seemed to be a sort of high priest or president of the orgies. Attached to his arms were giant imitations of bat wings which he moved grotesquely as if in flight. There were many women in the throng, which numbered fully I should think a hundred people. But the final collapse of my brave, unhappy Valera at this point brought home to me the nature of the peril in which I stood.

"He lay at my feet, moving convulsively, and sinking ever deeper in the swamp, red leeches moving slowly, slowly over his fast-disappearing body."

Colonel Menendez paused in his appalling narrative and wiped his moist forehead with a silk handkerchief. Neither Harley nor I spoke. I knew not if my friend believed the Spaniard's story. For my own part I found it difficult to do so. But that the narrator was deeply moved was a fact beyond dispute.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He suddenly commenced again:

"My next recollection is of awakening in my own bed at the hacienda. I had staggered back as far as the veranda, in raving delirium, and in the grip of a strange fever which prostrated me for many months, and which defied the knowledge of all the specialists who could be procured from Cuba and the United States. My survival was due to an iron constitution; but I have never been the same man. I was ordered to leave the West Indies directly it became possible for me to be moved. I arranged my affairs accordingly, and did not return for many years.

"Finally, however, I again took up my residence in Cuba, and for a time all went well, and might have continued to do so, but for the following incident. One night, being troubled by insomnia—sleeplessness—and the heat, I walked out on to the balcony in front of my bedroom window. As I did so, a figure which had been —you say lurking?—somewhere under the veranda ran swiftly off; but not so swiftly that I failed to obtain a glimpse of the uplifted face.

"It was the big negro! Although many years had elapsed since I had seen him wearing the bat wings at those unholy rites, I knew him instantly.

"On a little table close behind me where I stood lay a loaded revolver. I snatched it in a flash and fired shot after shot at the retreating figure."

Colonel Menendez shrugged his shoulders and selected a fresh cigarette paper.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "from that moment until this I have gone in hourly peril of my life. Whether I hit my man or missed him, I have never known to this day. If he lives or is dead I cannot say. But—" he paused impressively—"I have told you of something

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

that was nailed to the hut of a certain native girl? Before she died I knew that it was a death-token.

"On the morning after the episode which I have just related attached to the main door of the hacienda was found that same token."

"And it was?" said Harley, eagerly.

"It was the wing of a bat!

"I am perhaps a hasty man. It is in my blood. I tore the unclean thing from the panel and stamped it under my feet. No one of the servants who had drawn my attention to its presence would consent to touch it. Indeed, they all shrank from me as though I, too, were unclean. I endeavoured to forget it. Who was I to be influenced by the threats of natives?

"That night, just at the hour of sunset, a shot was fired at me from a neighbouring clump of trees, only missing me I think by the fraction of an inch. I realized that the peril was real, and was one against which I could not fight.

"Permit me to be brief, gentlemen. Six attempts of various kinds were made upon my life in Cuba. I crossed to the United States. In Washington, the political capital of the country, an assassin gained access to my hotel apartment and but for the fact that a friend chanced to call me up on the telephone at that late hour of the night, thereby awakening me, I should have received a knife in my heart. I saw the knife in the dim light; I saw the shadowy figure. I leapt out on the opposite side of the bed, seized a table-lamp which stood there, and hurled it at my assailant.

"There was a crash, a stifled exclamation, shuffling, the door opened, and my would-be assassin was gone. But I had learned something, and to my old fears a new one was added."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"What had you learned?" asked Harley, whose interest in the narrative was displayed by the fact that his pipe had long since gone out.

"Vaguely, vaguely, you understand, for there was little light, I had seen the face of the man. He wore some kind of black cloak doubtless to conceal his movements. His silhouette resembled that of a bat. But, gentlemen, he was neither a negro nor even a half-caste; he was of the white races, to that I could swear."

Colonel Menendez lighted the cigarette which he had been busily rolling, and fixed his dark eyes upon Harley.

"You puzzle me, sir," said the latter. "Do you wish me to believe that this cult of Voodoo claims European or American devotees?"

"I wish you to believe," returned the Colonel, "that although as the result of the alarm which I gave the hotel was searched and the Washington police exerted themselves to the utmost, no trace was ever found of the man who had tried to murder me, except"—he extended a long, yellow forefinger, and pointed to the wing of the bat lying upon Harley's table—"a bat wing was found pinned to my bedroom door."

Silence fell for a while; an impressive silence. Truly this was the strangest story to which I had ever listened.

"How long ago was that?" asked Harley.

"Only two years ago. At about the time that the great war terminated. I came to Europe and believed that at last I had found security. I lived for a time in London amidst a refreshing peace that was new to me. Then, chancing to hear of a property in Surrey which was available, I leased it for a period of years, installing—is it correct?—my cousin, Madame de Stämer, as housekeeper. Madame, alas, is an invalid,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

but"—he kissed his fingers—"a genius. She has with her, as companion, a very charming English girl, Miss Val Beverley, the orphaned daughter of a distinguished surgeon of Edinburg. Miss Beverley was with my cousin in the hospital which she established in France during the war. If you will honour me with your presence at Cray's Folly to-morrow, gentlemen, you will not lack congenial company, I can assure you."

He raised his heavy eyebrows, looking interrogatively from Harley to myself.

"For my own part," said my friend, slowly, "I shall be delighted. What do you say, Knox?"

"I also."

"But," continued Harley, "your presence here to-day, Colonel Menendez, suggests to my mind that England has not proved so safe a haven as you had anticipated?"

Colonel Menendez crossed the room and stood once more before the Burmese cabinet, one hand resting upon his hip; a massive yet graceful figure.

"Mr. Harley," he replied, "four days ago my butler, who is a Spaniard, brought me——" He pointed to the bat wing lying upon the blotting pad. "He had found it pinned to an oaken panel of the main entrance door."

"Was it prior to this discovery, or after it," asked Harley, "that you detected the presence of someone lurking in the neighbourhood of the house?"

"Before it."

"And the burglarious entrance?"

"That took place rather less than a month ago. On the eve of the full moon."

Paul Harley stood up and relighted his pipe.

"There are quite a number of other details, Colonel,"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

he said, "which I shall require you to place in my possession. Since I have determined to visit Cray's Folly, these can wait until my arrival. I particularly refer to a remark concerning a neighbour of yours in Surrey."

Colonel Menendez nodded, twirling his cigarette between his long, yellow fingers.

"It is a delicate matter, gentlemen," he confessed. "I must take time to consider how I shall place it before you. But I may count upon your arrival tomorrow?"

"Certainly. I am looking forward to the visit with keen interest."

"It is important," declared our visitor; "for on Wednesday is the full moon, and the full moon is in some way associated with the sacrificial rites of Voodoo."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

THE VAMPIRE BAT

AN HOUR had elapsed since the departure of our visitor, and Paul Harley and I sat in the cosy, book-lined study discussing the strange story which had been related to us. Harley, who had a friend attached to the Spanish Embassy, had succeeded in getting in touch with him at his chambers, and had obtained some few particulars of interest concerning Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez, for such were the full names and titles of our late caller.

He was apparently the last representative of a once great Spanish family, established for many generations in Cuba. His wealth was incalculable, although the value of his numerous estates had depreciated in recent years. His family had produced many men of subtle intellect and powerful administrative qualities; but allied to this they had all possessed traits of cruelty and debauchery which at one time had made the name of Menendez a by-word in the West Indies. That there were many people in that part of the world who would gladly have assassinated the Colonel, Paul Harley's informant did not deny. But although this information somewhat enlarged our knowledge of my friend's newest client, it threw no fresh light upon that side of his story which related to Voodoo and the extraordinary bat wing episodes.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Of course," said Harley, after a long silence, "there is one possibility of which we must not lose sight."

"What possibility is that?" I asked.

"That Menendez may be mad. Remorse for crimes of cruelty committed in his youth, and beyond doubt he has been guilty of many, may have led to a sort of obsession. I have known such cases."

"That was my first impression," I confessed, "but it faded somewhat as the Colonel's story proceeded. I don't think any such explanation would cover the facts."

"Neither do I," agreed my friend; "but it is distinctly possible that such an obsession exists, and that someone is deliberately playing upon it for his own ends."

"You mean that someone who knows of these episodes in the earlier life of Menendez is employing them now for a secret purpose of his own?"

"Exactly."

"It renders the case none the less interesting."

"I quite agree, Knox. With you, I believe, that even if the Colonel is not quite sane, at the same time his fears are by no means imaginary."

He gingerly took up the bat wing from the arm of his chair where he had placed it after a detailed examination.

"It seems to be pretty certain," he said, "that this thing is the wing of a Desmodus or Vampire Bat. Now, according to our authority"—he touched a work which lay open on the other arm of his chair—"these are natives of tropical America, therefore the presence of a living vampire bat in Surrey is not to be anticipated. I am personally satisfied, however, that this unpleasant fragment has been preserved in some way."

"You mean that it is part of a specimen from someone's collection?"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Quite possibly. But even a collection of such bats would be quite a novelty. I don't know that I can recollect one outside the Museums. To follow this bat wing business further: there was one very curious point in the Colonel's narrative. You recollect his reference to a native girl who had betrayed certain information to the manager of the estate?"

I nodded rapidly.

"A bat wing was affixed to the wall of her hut and she died, according to our informant, of a lingering sickness. Now this lingering sickness might have been anæmia, and anæmia may be induced, either in man or beast, by frequent but unsuspected visits of a Vampire Bat."

"Good heavens, Harley!" I exclaimed, "what a horrible idea."

"It *is* a horrible idea, but in countries infested by these creatures such things happen occasionally. I distinctly recollect a story which I once heard, of a little girl in some district of tropical America falling into such a decline, from which she was only rescued in the nick of time by the discovery that one of these Vampire Bats, a particularly large one, had formed the habit of flying into her room at night and attaching itself to her bare arm which lay outside the coverlet."

"How did it penetrate the mosquito curtains?" I enquired, incredulously.

"The very point, Knox, which led to the discovery of the truth. The thing, exhibiting a sort of uncanny intelligence, used to work its way up under the edge of the netting. This disturbance of the curtains was noticed on several occasions by the nurse who occupied an adjoining room, and finally led to the detection of the bat!

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"But surely," I said, "such a visitation would awaken any sleeper?"

"On the contrary, it induces deeper sleep. But I have not yet come to my point, Knox. The vengeance of the High Priest of Voodoo, who figured in the Colonel's narrative, was characteristic in the case of the native woman, since her symptoms at least simulated those which would result from the visits of a Vampire Bat, although of course they may have been due to a slow poison. But you will not have failed to note that the several attacks upon the Colonel personally were made with more ordinary weapons. On two occasions at least a rifle was employed."

"Yes," I replied, slowly. "You are wondering why the lingering sickness did not visit him?"

"I am, Knox. I can only suppose that he proved to be immune. You recall his statement that he made an almost miraculous recovery from the fever which attacked him after his visit to the Black Belt? This would seem to point to the fact that he possesses that rare type of constitution which almost defies organisms deadly to ordinary men."

"I see. Hence the dagger and the rifle?"

"So it would appear."

"But, Harley," I cried, "what appalling crime can the man have committed to call down upon his head a vengeance which has survived for so many years?"

Paul Harley shrugged his shoulders in a whimsical imitation of the Spaniard.

"I doubt if the feud dates any earlier," he replied, "than the time of Menendez's last return to Cuba. On that occasion he evidently killed the High Priest of Voodoo."

I uttered an exclamation of scorn.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"My dear Harley," I said, "the whole thing is too utterly fantastic. I begin to believe again that we are dealing with a madman."

Harley glanced down at the wing of the bat.

"We shall see," he murmured. "Even if the only result of our visit is to make the acquaintance of the Colonel's household our time will not have been wasted."

"No," said I, "that is true enough. I am looking forward to meeting Madame de Stämer——"

"The Colonel's invalid cousin," added Harley, tonelessly.

"And her companion, Miss Beverley."

"Quite so. Nor must we forget the Spanish butler, and the Colonel himself, whose acquaintance I am extremely anxious to renew."

"The whole thing is wildly bizarre, Harley."

"My dear Knox," he replied, stretching himself luxuriously in the long lounge chair, "the most commonplace life hovers on the edge of the bizarre. But those of us who overstep the border become preposterous in the eyes of those who have never done so. This is not because the unusual is necessarily the untrue, but because writers of fiction have claimed the unusual as their particular province, and in doing so have divorced it from fact in the public eye. Thus I, myself, am a myth, and so are you, Knox!"

He raised his hand and pointed to the doorway communicating with the office.

"We owe our mythological existence to that American genius whose portrait hangs beside the Burmese cabinet and who indiscreetly created the character of C. Auguste Dupin. The doings of this amateur investigator were chronicled by an admirer, you may remember, since when no private detective has been

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

allowed to exist outside the pages of fiction. My most trivial habits confirm my unreality.

"For instance, I have a friend who is good enough sometimes to record my movements. So had Dupin. I smoke a pipe. So did Dupin. I investigate crime, and I am sometimes successful. Here I differ from Dupin. Dupin was always successful. But my argument is this—you complain that the life of Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez, on his own showing, has been at least as romantic as his name. It would not be accounted romantic by the adventurous, Knox; it is only romantic to the prosaic mind. In the same way his name is only unusual to our English ears. In Spain it would pass unnoticed."

"I see your point," I said, grudgingly; "but think of Voodoo in the Surrey Hills."

"I am thinking of it, Knox, and it affords me much delight to think of it. You have placed your finger upon the very point I was endeavouring to make. Voodoo in the Surrey Hills! Quite so. Voodoo in some island of the Caribbean Seas, yes, but Voodoo in the Surrey Hills, no. Yet, my dear fellow, there is a regular steamer service between South America and England. Or one may embark at Liverpool and disembark in the Spanish Main. Why, then, may not one embark in the West Indies and disembark at Liverpool? This granted, you will also grant that from Liverpool to Surrey is a feasible journey. Why, then, should you exclaim, 'but Voodoo in the Surrey Hills!' You would be surprised to meet an Esquimaux in the Strand, but there is no reason why an Esquimaux should not visit the Strand. In short, the most annoying thing about fact is its resemblance to fiction. I am looking forward to the day, Knox, when I can retire from my

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

present fictitious profession and become a recognized member of the community; such as a press agent, a theatrical manager, or some other dealer in Fact!"

He burst out laughing, and reaching over to a side-table refilled my glass and his own.

"There lies the wing of a Vampire Bat," he said, pointing, "in Chancery Lane. It is impossible. Yet," he raised his glass, "'Pussyfoot' Johnson has visited Scotland, the home of Whisky!"

We were silent for a while, whilst I considered his remarks.

"The conclusion to which I have come," declared Harley, "is that nothing is so strange as the commonplace. A rod and line, a boat, a luncheon hamper, a jar of good ale, and the peculiar peace of a Norfolk river—these joys I willingly curtail in favour of the unknown things which await us at Cray's Folly. Remember, Knox," he stared at me queerly, "Wednesday is the night of the full moon."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER IV

CRAY'S FOLLY

PAUL HARLEY lay back upon the cushions and glanced at me with a quizzical smile. The big, up-to-date car which Colonel Menendez had placed at our disposal was surmounting a steep Surrey lane as though no gradient had existed.

"Some engine!" he said, approvingly.

I nodded in agreement, but felt disinclined for conversation, being absorbed in watching the characteristically English scenery. This, indeed, was very beautiful. The lane along which we were speeding was narrow, winding, and over-arched by trees. Here and there sunlight penetrated to spread a golden carpet before us, but for the most part the way lay in cool and grateful shadow.

On one side a wooded slope hemmed us in blackly, on the other lay dell after dell down into the cradle of the valley. It was a poetic corner of England, and I thought it almost unbelievable that London was only some twenty miles behind. A fit place this for elves and fairies to survive, a spot in which the presence of a modern automobile seemed a desecration. Higher we mounted and higher, the engine running strongly and smoothly; then,presently, we were out upon a narrow open road with the crescent of the hills sweeping away on the right and dense woods dipping valleyward to the left and behind us.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The chauffeur turned, and, meeting my glance:

"Cray's Folly, sir," he said.

He jerked his hand in the direction of a square, gray-stone tower somewhat resembling a campanile, which uprose from a distant clump of woods cresting a greater eminence.

"Ah," murmured Harley, "the famous tower."

Following the departure of the Colonel on the previous evening, he had looked up Cray's Folly and had found it to be one of a series of houses erected by the eccentric and wealthy man whose name it bore. He had had a mania for building houses with towers, in which his rival—and contemporary—had been William Beckford, the author of "Vathek," a work which for some obscure reason has survived as well as two of the three towers erected by its writer.

I became conscious of a keen sense of anticipation. In this, I think, the figure of Miss Val Beverley played a leading part. There was something pathetic in the presence of this lonely English girl in so singular a household; for if the menage at Cray's Folly should prove half so strange as Colonel Menendez had led us to believe, then truly we were about to find ourselves amid unusual people.

Presently the road inclined southward somewhat and we entered the fringe of the trees. I noticed one or two very ancient cottages, but no trace of the modern builder. This was a fragment of real Old England, and I was not sorry when presently we lost sight of the square tower; for amidst such scenery it was an anomaly and a rebuke.

What Paul Harley's thoughts may have been I cannot say, but he preserved an unbroken silence up to the very moment that we came to the gate lodge.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The gates were monstrosities of elaborate iron scroll-work, craftsmanship clever enough in its way, but of an ornate kind more in keeping with the orange trees of the South than with this wooded Surrey countryside.

A very surly-looking girl, quite obviously un-English (a daughter of Pedro, the butler, I learned later), opened the gates, and we entered upon a winding drive literally tunnelled through the trees. Of the house we had never a glimpse until we were right under its walls, nor should I have known that we were come to the main entrance if the car had not stopped.

"Looks like a monastery," muttered Harley.

Indeed that part of the building—the north front—which was visible from this point had a strangely monastic appearance, being built of solid gray blocks and boasting only a few small, heavily barred windows. The eccentricity of the Victorian gentleman who had expended thousands of pounds upon erecting this house was only equalled, I thought, by that of Colonel Menendez, who had chosen it for a home. An out-jutting wing shut us in on the west, and to the east the prospect was closed by the tallest and most densely grown box hedge I had ever seen, trimmed most perfectly and having an arched opening in the centre. Thus, the entrance to Cray's Folly lay in a sort of bay.

But even as we stepped from the car, the great church-like oaken doors were thrown open, and there, framed in the monkish porch, stood the tall, elegant figure of the Colonel.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "welcome to Cray's Folly."

He advanced smiling, and in the bright sunlight seemed even more Mephistophelean than he had seemed in Harley's office.

"Pedro," he called, and a strange-looking Spanish

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

butler who wore his side-whiskers like a bull fighter appeared behind his master; a sallow, furtive fellow with whom I determined I should never feel at ease.

However, the Colonel greeted us heartily enough, and conducted us through a kind of paved, covered court-yard into a great lofty hall. Indeed it more closely resembled a studio, being partly lighted by a most curious dome. It was furnished in a manner quite un-English, but very luxuriously. A magnificent oaken staircase communicated with a gallery on the left, and at the foot of this staircase, in a mechanical chair which she managed with astonishing dexterity, sat Madame de Stämer.

She had snow-white hair crowning the face of a comparatively young woman, and large, dark-brown eyes which reminded me strangely of the eyes of some animal although in the first moment of meeting I could not identify the resemblance. Her hands were very slender and beautiful, and when, as the Colonel presented us, she extended her fingers, I was not surprised to see Harley stoop and kiss them in Continental fashion; for this Madame evidently expected. I followed suit; but truth to tell, after that first glance at the masterful figure in the invalid chair I had had no eyes for Madame de Stämer, being fully employed in gazing at someone who stood beside her.

This was an evasively pretty girl, or such was my first impression. That is to say, that whilst her attractiveness was beyond dispute, analysis of her small features failed to detect from which particular quality this charm was derived. The contour of her face certainly formed a delightful oval, and there was a wistful look in her eyes which was half appealing and half impish. Her demure expression was not con-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

vincing, and there rested a vague smile, or promise of a smile, upon lips which were perfectly moulded, and indeed the only strictly regular feature of a nevertheless bewitching face. She had slightly curling hair and the line of her neck and shoulder was most graceful and charming. Of one thing I was sure: She was glad to see visitors at Cray's Folly.

"And now, gentlemen," said Colonel Menendez, "having presented you to Madame, my cousin, permit me to present you to Miss Val Beverley, my cousin's companion, and our very dear friend."

The girl bowed in a formal English fashion, which contrasted sharply with the Continental manner of Madame. Her face flushed slightly, and as I met her glance she lowered her eyes.

"Now M. Harley and M. Knox," said Madame, vivaciously, "you are quite at home. Pedro will show you to your rooms and lunch will be ready in half an hour."

She waved her white hand coquettishly, and ignoring the proffered aid of Miss Beverley, wheeled her chair away at a great rate under a sort of arch on the right of the hall, which communicated with the domestic offices of the establishment.

"Is she not wonderful?" exclaimed Colonel Menendez, taking Harley's left arm and my right and guiding us upstairs followed by Pedro and the chauffeur, the latter carrying our grips. "Many women would be prostrated by such an affliction, but she——" he shrugged his shoulders.

Harley and I had been placed in adjoining rooms. I had never seen such rooms as those in Cray's Folly. The place contained enough oak to have driven a modern builder crazy. Oak had simply been lavished upon it. My own room, which was almost directly

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

above the box hedge to which I have referred, had a beautiful carved ceiling and a floor as highly polished as that of a ballroom. It was tastefully furnished, but the foreign note was perceptible everywhere.

"We have here some grand prospects," said the Colonel, and truly enough the view from the great, high, wide window was a very fine one.

I perceived that the grounds of Cray's Folly were extensive and carefully cultivated. I had a glimpse of a Tudor sunken garden, but the best view of this was from the window of Harley's room, which because it was the end room on the north front overlooked another part of the grounds, and offered a prospect of the east lawns and distant park land.

When presently Colonel Menendez and I accompanied my friend there I was charmed by the picturesque scene below. Here was a real old herbal garden, gay with flowers and intersected by tiled moss-grown paths. There were bushes exhibiting fantastic examples of the topiary art, and here, too, was a sun-dial. My first impression of this beautiful spot was one of delight. Later I was to regard that enchanted demesne with something akin to horror; but as we stood there watching a gardener clipping the bushes I thought that although Cray's Folly might be adjudged ugly, its grounds were delightful.

Suddenly Harley turned to our host. "Where is the famous tower?" he enquired. "It is not visible from the front of the house, nor from the drive."

"No, no," replied the Colonel, "it is right out at the end of the east wing, which is disused. I keep it locked up. There are four rooms in the tower and a staircase, of course, but it is inconvenient. I cannot imagine why it was built."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"The architect may have had some definite object in view," said Harley, "or it may have been merely a freak of his client. Is there anything characteristic about the topmost room, for instance?"

Colonel Menendez shrugged his massive shoulders.

"Nothing," he replied. "It is the same as the others below, except that there is a stair leading to a gallery on the roof. Presently I will take you up, if you wish."

"I should be interested," murmured Harley, and tactfully changed the subject, which evidently was not altogether pleasing to our host. I concluded that he had found the east wing of the house something of a white elephant, and was accordingly sensitive upon the point.

Presently, then, he left us and I returned to my own room, but before long I rejoined Harley. I did not knock but entered unceremoniously.

"Halloa!" I exclaimed. "What have you seen?"

He was standing staring out of the window, nor did he turn as I entered.

"What is it?" I said, joining him.

He glanced at me oddly.

"An impression," he replied; "but it has gone now."

"I understand," I said, quietly.

Familiarity with crime in many guises and under many skies had developed in Paul Harley a sort of sixth sense. It was a fugitive, fickle thing, as are all the powers which belong to the realm of genius or inspiration. Often enough it failed him entirely, he had assured me, that odd, sudden chill as of an abrupt lowering of the temperature, which, I understood, often advised him of the nearness of enmity actively malignant.

Now, standing at the window, looking down into that

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

old-world garden, he was "sensing" the atmosphere keenly, seeking for the note of danger. It was sheer intuition, perhaps, but whilst he could never rely upon its answering his summons, once active it never misled him.

"You think some real menace overhangs Colonel Menendez?"

"I am sure of it." He stared into my face. "There is something very, very strange about this bat wing business."

"Do you still incline to the idea that he has been followed to England?"

Paul Harley reflected for a moment, then:

"That explanation would be almost too simple," he said. "There is something bizarre, something unclean—I had almost said unholy—at work in this house, Knox."

"He has foreign servants."

Harley shook his head.

"I shall make it my business to become acquainted with all of them," he replied, "but the danger does not come from there. Let us go down to lunch."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER V

VAL BEVERLEY

THE luncheon was so good as to be almost ostentatious. One could not have lunched better at the Carlton. Yet, since this luxurious living was evidently customary in the colonel's household, a charge of ostentation would not have been deserved. The sinister-looking Pedro proved to be an excellent servant; and because of the excitement of feeling myself to stand upon the edge of unusual things, the enjoyment of a perfectly served repast, and the sheer delight which I experienced in watching the play of expression upon the face of Miss Beverley, I count that luncheon at Cray's Folly a memorable hour of my life.

Frankly, Val Beverley puzzled me. It may or may not have been curious, that amidst such singular company I selected for my especial study a girl so freshly and typically English. I had thought at the moment of meeting her that she was provokingly pretty; I determined, as the lunch proceeded, that she was beautiful. Once I caught Harley smiling at me in his quizzical fashion, and I wondered guiltily if I were displaying an undue interest in the companion of Madame.

Many topics were discussed, I remember, and beyond doubt the colonel's cousin-housekeeper dominated the debate. She possessed extraordinary force of personality. Her English was not nearly so fluent as that spoken by the colonel, but this handicap only served to

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

emphasize the masculine strength of her intellect. Truly she was a remarkable woman. With her blanched hair and her young face, and those fine, velvety eyes which possessed a quality almost hypnotic, she might have posed for the figure of a sorceress. She had unfamiliar gestures and employed her long white hands in a manner that was new to me and utterly strange.

I could detect no family resemblance between the cousins, and I wondered if their kinship were very distant. One thing was evident enough: Madame de Stämer was devoted to the Colonel. Her expression when she looked at him changed entirely. For a woman of such intense vitality her eyes were uncannily still; that is to say that whilst she frequently moved her head she rarely moved her eyes. Again and again I found myself wondering where I had seen such eyes before. I lived to identify that memory, as I shall presently relate.

In vain I endeavoured to define the relationship between these three people, so incongruously set beneath one roof. Of the fact that Miss Beverly was not happy I became assured. But respecting her exact position in the household I was reduced to surmises.

The Colonel improved on acquaintance. I decided that he belonged to an order of Spanish grandees now almost extinct. I believed he would have made a very staunch friend; I felt sure he would have proved a most implacable enemy. Altogether, it was a memorable meal, and one notable result of that brief companionship was a kind of link of understanding between myself and Miss Beverley.

Once, when I had been studying Madame de Stämer, and again, as I removed my glance from the dark face

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

of Colonel Menendez, I detected the girl watching me; and her eyes said, "You understand; so do I."

Some things perhaps I did understand, but how few the near future was to show.

The signal for our departure from table was given by Madame de Stämer. She whisked her chair back with extraordinary rapidity, the contrast between her swift, nervous movements and those still, basilisk eyes being almost uncanny.

"Off you go, Juan," she said; "your visitors would like to see the garden, no doubt. I must be away for my afternoon siesta. Come, my dear"—to the girl—"smoke one little cigarette with me, then I will let you go."

She retired, wheeling herself rapidly out of the room, and my glance lingered upon the graceful figure of Val Beverley until both she and Madame were out of sight.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Colonel, resuming his seat and pushing the decanter toward Paul Harley, "I am at your service either for business or amusement. I think"—to Harley—"you expressed a desire to see the tower?"

"I did," my friend replied, lighting his cigar, "but only if it would amuse you to show me."

"Decidedly. Mr. Knox will join us?"

Harley, unseen by the Colonel, glanced at me in a way which I knew.

"Thanks all the same," I said, smiling, "but following a perfect luncheon I should much prefer to loll upon the lawn, if you don't mind."

"But certainly I do not mind," cried the Colonel. "I wish you to be happy."

"Join you in a few minutes, Knox," said Harley as he went out with our host.

"All right," I replied, "I should like to take a stroll

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

around the gardens. You will join me there later, no doubt."

As I walked out into the bright sunshine I wondered why Paul Harley had wished to be left alone with Colonel Menendez, but knowing that I should learn his motive later, I strolled on through the gardens, my mind filled with speculations respecting these unusual people with whom Fate had brought me in contact. I felt that Miss Beverley needed protection of some kind, and I was conscious of a keen desire to afford her that protection. In her glance I had read, or thought I had read, an appeal for sympathy.

Not the least mystery of Cray's Folly was the presence of this girl. Only toward the end of luncheon had I made up my mind upon a point which had been puzzling me. Val Beverley's gaiety was a cloak. Once I had detected her watching Madame de Stämer with a look strangely like that of fear.

Puffing contentedly at my cigar I proceeded to make a tour of the house. It was constructed irregularly. Practically the entire building was of gray stone, which created a depressing effect even in the blazing sunlight, lending Cray's Folly something of an austere aspect. There were fine lofty windows, however, to most of the ground-floor rooms overlooking the lawns, and some of those above had balconies of the same gray stone. Quite an extensive kitchen garden and a line of glass-houses adjoined the west wing, and here were outbuildings, coach-houses and a garage, all connected by a covered passage with the servants' quarters.

Pursuing my enquiries, I proceeded to the north front of the building, which was closely hemmed in by trees, and which as we had observed on our arrival resembled the entrance to a monastery.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Passing the massive oaken door by which we had entered and which was now closed again, I walked on through the opening in the box hedge into a part of the grounds which was not so sprucely groomed as the rest. On one side were the yews flanking the Tudor garden and before me uprose the famous tower. As I stared up at the square structure, with its uncurtained windows, I wondered, as others had wondered before me, what could have ever possessed any man to build it.

Visible at points for many miles around, it undoubtedly disfigured an otherwise beautiful landscape.

I pressed on, noting that the windows of the rooms in the east wing were shuttered and the apartments evidently disused. I came to the base of the tower. To the south, the country rose up to the highest point in the crescent of hills, and peeping above the trees at no great distance away, I detected the red brick chimneys of some old house in the woods. North and east, velvet sward swept down to the park.

As I stood there admiring the prospect and telling myself that no Voodoo devilry could find a home in this peaceful English countryside, I detected a faint sound of voices far above. Someone had evidently come out upon the gallery of the tower. I looked upward, but I could not see the speakers. I pursued my stroll, until, near the eastern base of the tower, I encountered a perfect thicket of rhododendrons. Finding no path through this shrubbery, I retraced my steps, presently entering the Tudor garden; and there strolling toward me, a book in her hand, was Miss Beverley.

"Holloa, Mr. Knox," she called; "I thought you had gone up the tower?"

"No," I replied, laughing, "I lack the energy."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Do you?" she said, softly, "then sit down and talk to me."

She dropped down upon a grassy bank, looking up at me invitingly, and I accepted the invitation without demur.

"I love this old garden," she declared, "although of course it is really no older than the rest of the place. I always think there should be peacocks, though."

"Yes," I agreed, "peacocks would be appropriate."

"And little pages dressed in yellow velvet."

She met my glance soberly for a moment and then burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"Do you know, Miss Beverley," I said, watching her, "I find it hard to place you in the household of the Colonel."

"Yes?" she said simply; "you must."

"Oh, then you realize that you are——"

"Out of place here?"

"Quite."

"Of course I am."

She smiled, shook her head, and changed the subject.

"I am so glad Mr. Paul Harley has come down," she confessed.

"You know my friend by name, then?"

"Yes," she replied, "someone I met in Nice spoke of him, and I know he is very clever."

"In Nice? Did you live in Nice before you came here?"

Val Beverley nodded slowly, and her glance grew oddly retrospective.

"I lived for over a year with Madame de Stämer in a little villa on the Promenade des Anglaise," she replied. "That was after Madame was injured."

"She sustained her injuries during the war, I understand?"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Yes. Poor Madame. The hospital of which she was in charge was bombed and the shock left her as you see her. I was there, too, but I luckily escaped without injury."

"What, you were there?"

"Yes. That was where I first met Madame de Stämer. She used to be very wealthy, you see, and she established this hospital in France at her own expense, and I was one of her assistants for a time. She lost both her husband and her fortune in the war, and as if that were not bad enough, lost the use of her limbs, too."

"Poor woman," I said. "I had no idea her life had been so tragic. She has wonderful courage."

"Courage!" exclaimed the girl, "if you knew all that I know about her."

Her face grew sweetly animated as she bent toward me excitedly and confidentially.

"Really, she is simply wonderful. I learned to respect her in those days as I have never respected any other woman in the world; and when, after all her splendid work, she, so vital and active, was stricken down like that, I felt that I simply could not leave her, especially as she asked me to stay."

"So you went with her to Nice?"

"Yes. Then the Colonel took this house, and we came here, but——"

She hesitated, and glanced at me curiously.

"Perhaps you are not quite happy?"

"No," she said, "I am not. You see it was different in France. I knew so many people. But here at Cray's Folly it is so lonely, and Madame is——"

Again she hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Well," she laughed in an embarrassed fashion, "I am afraid of her at times."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"In what way?"

"Oh, in a silly, womanish sort of way. Of course she is a wonderful manager; she rules the house with a rod of iron. But really I haven't anything to do here, and I feel frightfully out of place sometimes. Then the Colonel—— Oh, but what am I talking about?"

"Won't you tell me what it is that the Colonel fears?"

"You know that he fears something, then?"

"Of course. That is why Paul Harley is here."

A change came over the girl's face; a look almost of dread.

"I wish I knew what it all meant."

"You are aware, then, that there is something wrong?"

"Naturally I am. Sometimes I have been so frightened that I have made up my mind to leave the very next day."

"You mean that you have been frightened at night?" I asked with curiosity.

"Dreadfully frightened."

"Won't you tell me in what way?"

She looked up at me swiftly, then turned her head aside, and bit her lip.

"No, not now," she replied. "I can't very well."

"Then at least tell me why you stayed?"

"Well," she smiled rather pathetically, "for one thing, I haven't anywhere else to go."

"Have you no friends in England?"

She shook her head.

"No. There was only poor daddy, and he died over two years ago. That was when I went to Nice."

"Poor little girl," I said; and the words were spoken before I realized their undue familiarity.

An apology was on the tip of my tongue, but Miss

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Beverley did not seem to have noticed the indiscretion. Indeed my sympathy was sincere, and I think she had appreciated the fact.

She looked up again with a bright smile.

"Why are we talking about such depressing things on this simply heavenly day?" she exclaimed.

"Goodness knows," said I. "Will you show me round these lovely gardens?"

"Delighted, sir!" replied the girl, rising and sweeping me a mocking curtsey.

Thereupon we set out, and at every step I found a new delight in some wayward curl, in a gesture, in the sweet voice of my companion. Her merry laugh was music, but in wistful mood I think she was even more alluring.

The menace, if menace there were, which overhung Cray's Folly, ceased to exist—for me, at least, and I blessed the lucky chance which had led to my presence there.

We were presently rejoined by Colonel Menendez and Paul Harley, and I gathered that my surmise that it had been their voices which I had heard proceeding from the top of the tower to have been only partly accurate.

"I know you will excuse me, Mr. Harley," said the Colonel, "for detailing the duty to Pedro, but my wind is not good enough for the stairs."

He used idiomatic English at times with that facility which some foreigners acquire, but always smiled in a self-satisfied way when he had employed a slang term.

"I quite understand, Colonel," replied Harley. "The view from the top was very fine."

"And now, gentlemen," continued the Colonel, "if Miss Beverley will excuse us, we will retire to the library and discuss business."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"As you wish," said Harley; "but I have an idea that it is your custom to rest in the afternoon."

Colonel Menendez shrugged his shoulders. "It used to be," he admitted, "but I have too much to think about in these days."

"I can see that you have much to tell me," admitted Harley; "and therefore I am entirely at your service."

Val Beverley smiled and walked away swinging her book, at the same time treating me to a glance which puzzled me considerably. I wondered if I had mistaken its significance, for it had seemed to imply that she had accepted me as an ally. Certainly it served to awaken me to the fact that I had discovered a keen personal interest in the mystery which hung over this queerly assorted household.

I glanced at my friend as the Colonel led the way into the house. I saw him staring upward with a peculiar expression upon his face, and following the direction of his glance I could see an awning spread over one of the gray-stone balconies. Beneath it, reclining in a long cane chair, lay Madame de Stämer. I think she was asleep; at any rate, she gave no sign, but lay there motionless, as Harley and I walked in through the open French window followed by Colonel Menendez.

Odd and unimportant details sometimes linger long in the memory. And I remember noticing that a needle of sunlight, piercing a crack in the gaily-striped awning rested upon a ring which Madame wore, so that the diamonds glittered like sparks of white-hot fire.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER VI

THE BARRIER

COLONEL Menendez conducted us to a long, lofty library in which might be detected the same note of un-English luxury manifested in the other appointments of the house. The room, in common with every other which I had visited in Cray's Folly, was carried out in oak: doors, window frames, mantelpiece, and ceiling representing fine examples of this massive woodwork. Indeed, if the eccentricity of the designer of Cray's Folly were not sufficiently demonstrated by the peculiar plan of the building, its construction wholly of granite and oak must have marked him a man of unusual if substantial ideas.

There were four long windows opening on to a veranda which commanded a view of part of the rose garden and of three terraced lawns descending to a lake upon which I perceived a number of swans. Beyond, in the valley, lay verdant pastures, where cattle grazed. A lark hung carolling blithely far above, and the sky was almost cloudless. I could hear a steam reaper at work somewhere in the distance. This, with the more intimate rattle of a lawn-mower wielded by a gardener who was not visible from where I stood, alone disturbed the serene silence, except that presently I detected the droning of many bees among the roses. Sunlight flooded the prospect; but the veranda lay in shadow, and that long, oaken room was refreshingly cool and laden with the heavy perfume of the flowers.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

From the windows, then, one beheld a typical English summer-scape, but the library itself struck an altogether more exotic note. There were many glazed bookcases of a garish design in ebony and gilt, and these were laden with a vast collection of works in almost every European language, reflecting perhaps the cosmopolitan character of the colonel's household. There was strange Spanish furniture upholstered in perforated leather and again displaying much gilt. There were suits of black armour and a great number of Moorish ornaments. The pictures were fine but sombre, and all of the Spanish school.

One Velasquez in particular I noted with surprise, reflecting that, assuming it to be an authentic work of the master, my entire worldly possessions could not have enabled me to buy it. It was the portrait of a typical Spanish cavalier and beyond doubt a Menendez. In fact, the resemblance between the haughty Spanish grandee, who seemed about to step out of the canvas and pick a quarrel with the spectator, and Colonel Don Juan himself was almost startling. Evidently, our host had imported most of his belongings from Cuba.

"Gentlemen," he said, as we entered, "make yourselves quite at home, I beg. All my poor establishment contains is for your entertainment and service."

He drew up two long, low lounge chairs, the arms provided with receptacles to contain cooling drinks; and the mere sight of these chairs mentally translated me to the Spanish Main, where I pictured them set upon the veranda of that hacienda which had formerly been our host's residence.

Harley and I became seated and Colonel Menendez disposed himself upon a leather-covered couch, nodding apologetically as he did so.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"My health requires that I should recline for a certain number of hours every day," he explained. "So you will please forgive me."

"My dear Colonel Menendez," said Harley, "I feel sure that you are interrupting your siesta in order to discuss the unpleasant business which finds us in such pleasant surroundings. Allow me once again to suggest that we postpone this matter until, shall we say, after dinner?"

"No, no! No, no," protested the Colonel, waving his hand deprecatingly. "Here is Pedro with coffee and some curaçao of a kind which I can really recommend, although you may be unfamiliar with it."

I was certainly unfamiliar with the liqueur which he insisted we must taste, and which was contained in a sort of square, opaque bottle unknown, I think, to English wine merchants. Beyond doubt it was potent stuff; and some cigars which the Spaniard produced on this occasion and which were enclosed in little glass cylinders resembling test-tubes and elaborately sealed, I recognized to be priceless. They convinced me, if conviction had not visited me already, that Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez belonged to that old school of West Indian planters by whom the tradition of the Golden Americas had been for long preserved in the Spanish Main.

We discussed indifferent matters for a while, sipping this wonderful curaçao of our host's. The effect created by the Colonel's story faded entirely, and when, the latter being unable to conceal his drowsiness, Harley stood up, I took the hint with gratitude; for at that moment I did not feel in the mood to discuss serious business or indeed business of any kind.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, also rising, in spite

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

of our protests, "I will observe your wishes. My guests' wishes are mine. We will meet the ladies for tea on the terrace."

Harley and I walked out into the garden together, our courteous host standing in the open window, and bowing in that exaggerated fashion which in another might have been ridiculous but which was possible in Colonel Menendez, because of the peculiar grace of deportment which was his.

As we descended the steps I turned and glanced back, I know not why. But the impression which I derived of the Colonel's face as he stood there in the shadow of the veranda was one I can never forget.

His expression had changed utterly, or so it seemed to me. He no longer resembled Velasquez' haughty cavalier; gone, too, was the debonnaire bearing. I turned my head aside swiftly, hoping that he had not detected my backward glance.

I felt that I had violated hospitality. I felt that I had seen what I should not have seen. And the result was to bring about that which no story of West Indian magic could ever have wrought in my mind.

A dreadful, cold premonition claimed me, a premonition that this was a doomed man.

The look which I had detected upon his face was an indefinable, an indescribable look; but I had seen it in the eyes of one who had been bitten by a poisonous reptile and who knew his hours to be numbered. It was uncanny, unnerving; and whereas at first the atmosphere of Colonel Menendez's home had seemed to be laden with prosperous security, now that sense of ease and restfulness was gone—and gone for ever.

"Harley," I said, speaking almost at random, "this

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

promises to be the strangest case you have ever handled."

"Promises?" Paul Harley laughed shortly. "It *is* the strangest case, Knox. It is a case of wheels within wheels, of mystery crowning mystery. Have you studied our host?"

"Closely."

"And what conclusion have you formed?"

"None at the moment; but I think one is slowly crystalizing."

"Hm," muttered Harley, as we paced slowly on amid the rose trees. "Of one thing I am satisfied."

"What is that?"

"That Colonel Menendez is not afraid of Bat Wing, whoever or whatever Bat Wing may be."

"Not afraid?"

"Certainly he is not afraid, Knox. He has possibly been afraid in the past, but now he is resigned."

"Resigned to what?"

"Resigned to death!"

"Good God, Harley, you are right!" I cried. "You are right! I saw it in his eyes as we left the library."

Harley stopped and turned to me sharply.

"You saw this in the Colonel's eyes?" he challenged.

"I did."

"Which corroborates my theory," he said, softly; "for *I* had seen it elsewhere."

"Where do you mean, Harley?"

"In the face of Madame de Stämer."

"What?"

"Knox"—Harley rested his hand upon my arm and looked about him cautiously—"*she knows*."

"But knows what?"

"That is the question which we are here to answer,

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

but I am as sure as it is humanly possible to be sure of anything that whatever Colonel Menendez may tell us to-night, one point at least he will withhold."

"What do you expect him to withhold?"

"The meaning of the sign of the Bat Wing."

"Then you think he knows its meaning?"

"He has told us that it is the death-token of Voo-doo."

I stared at Harley in perplexity.

"Then you believe his explanation to be false?"

"Not necessarily, Knox. It may be what he claims for it. But he is keeping something back. He speaks all the time from behind a barrier which he, himself, has deliberately erected against me."

"I cannot understand why he should do so," I declared, as he looked at me steadily. "Within the last few moments I have become definitely convinced that his appeal to you was no idle one. Therefore, why should he not offer you every aid in his power?"

"Why, indeed?" muttered Harley.

"The same thing," I continued, "applies to Madame de Stämer. If ever I have seen love-light in a woman's eyes I have seen it in hers, to-day, whenever her glance has rested upon Colonel Menendez. Harley, I believe she literally worships the ground he walks upon."

"She does, she does!" cried my companion, and emphasized the words with beats of his clenched fist. "It is utterly, damnably mystifying. But I tell you, she knows, Knox, she knows!"

"You mean she knows that he is a doomed man?"

Harley nodded rapidly.

"They both know," he replied; "but there is something which they dare not divulge."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He glanced at me swiftly, and his bronzed face wore a peculiar expression.

"Have you had an opportunity of any private conversation with Miss Val Beverley?" he enquired.

"Yes," I said. "Surely you remember that you found me chatting with her when you returned from your inspection of the tower."

"I remember perfectly well, but I thought you might have just met. Now it appears to me, Knox, that you have quickly established yourself in the good books of a very charming girl. My only reason for visiting the tower was to afford you just this opportunity! Don't frown. Beyond reminding you of the fact that she has been on intimate terms with Madame de Stämer for some years, I will not intrude in any way upon your private plans in that direction."

I stared at him, and I suppose my expression was an angry one.

"Surely you don't misunderstand me?" he said. "A cultured English girl of that type cannot possibly have lived with these people without learning something of the matters which are puzzling us so badly. Am I asking too much?"

"I see what you mean," I said, slowly. "No, I suppose you are right, Harley."

"Good," he muttered. "I will leave that side of the enquiry in your very capable hands, Knox."

He paused, and began to stare about him.

"From this point," said he, "we have an unobstructed view of the tower."

We turned and stood looking up at the unsightly gray structure, with its geometrical rows of windows and the minaret-like gallery at the top.

"Of course"—I broke a silence of some moments'

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

duration—"the entire scheme of Cray's Folly is peculiar, but the rooms, except for a uniformity which is monotonous, and an unimaginative scheme of decoration which makes them all seem alike, are airy and well lighted, eminently sane and substantial. The tower, however, is quite inexcusable, unless the idea was to enable the occupant to look over the tops of the trees in all directions."

"Yes," agreed Harley, "it is an ugly landmark. But yonder up the slope I can see the corner of what seems to be a very picturesque house of some kind."

"I caught a glimpse of it earlier to-day," I replied. "Yes, from this point a little more of it is visible. Apparently quite an old place."

I paused, staring up the hillside, but Harley, hands locked behind him and chin lowered reflectively, was pacing on. I joined him, and we proceeded for some little distance in silence, passing a gardener who touched his cap respectfully and to whom I thought at first my companion was about to address some remark. Harley passed on, however, still occupied, it seemed, with his reflections, and coming to a gravel path which, bordering one side of the lawns, led down from terrace to terrace into the valley, turned, and began to descend.

"Let us go and interview the swans," he murmured absently.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER VII

AT THE LAVENDER ARMS

IN CERTAIN moods Paul Harley was impossible as a companion, and I, who knew him well, had learned to leave him to his own devices at such times. These moods invariably corresponded with his meeting some problem to the heart of which the lance of his keen wit failed to penetrate. His humour might not display itself in the spoken word, he merely became oblivious of everything and everybody around him. People might talk to him and he scarce noted their presence, familiar faces appear and he would see them not. Outwardly he remained the observant Harley who could see further into a mystery than any other in England, but his observation was entirely introspective; although he moved amid the hustle of life he was spiritually alone, communing with the solitude which dwells in every man's heart.

Presently, then, as we came to the lake at the foot of the sloping lawns, where water lilies were growing and quite a number of swans had their habitation, I detected the fact that I had ceased to exist so far as Harley was concerned. Knowing this mood of old, I pursued my way alone, pressing on across the valley and making for a swing gate which seemed to open upon a public footpath. Coming to this gate I turned and looked back.

Paul Harley was standing where I had left him by the edge of the lake, staring as if hypnotized at the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

slowly moving swans. But I would have been prepared to wager that he saw neither swans nor lake, but mentally was far from the spot, deep in some complex maze of reflection through which no ordinary mind could hope to follow him.

I glanced at my watch and found that it was but little after two o'clock. Luncheon at Cray's Folly was early. I therefore had some time upon my hands and I determined to employ it in exploring part of the neighbourhood. Accordingly I filled and lighted my pipe and strolled leisurely along the footpath, enjoying the beauty of the afternoon, and admiring the magnificent timber which grew upon the southerly slopes of the valley.

Larks sang high above me and the air was fragrant with those wonderful earthy scents which belong to an English countryside. A herd of very fine Jersey cattle presently claimed inspection, and a little farther on I found myself upon a high road where a brown-faced fellow seated aloft upon a hay-cart cheerily gave me good-day as I passed.

Quite at random I turned to the left and followed the road, so that presently I found myself in a very small village, the principal building of which was a very small inn called the "Lavender Arms."

Colonel Menendez'scuraçao, combined with the heat of the day, had made me thirsty; for which reason I stepped into the bar-parlour determined to sample the local ale. I was served by the landlady, a neat, round, red little person, and as she retired, having placed a foam-capped mug upon the counter, her glance rested for a moment upon the only other occupant of the room, a man seated in an armchair immediately to the right of the door. A glass of whisky stood on the window ledge

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

at his elbow, and that it was by no means the first which he had imbibed, his appearance seemed to indicate.

Having tasted the cool contents of my mug, I leaned back against the counter and looked at this person curiously.

He was apparently of about medium height, but of a somewhat fragile appearance. He was dressed like a country gentleman, and a stick and soft hat lay upon the ledge near his glass. But the thing about him which had immediately arrested my attention was his really extraordinary resemblance to Paul Harley's engraving of Edgar Allan Poe.

I wondered at first if Harley's frequent references to the eccentric American genius, to whom he accorded a sort of hero-worship, were responsible for my imagining a close resemblance where only a slight one existed. But inspection of that strange, dark face convinced me of the fact that my first impression had been a true one. Perhaps, in my curiosity, I stared rather rudely.

"You will pardon me, sir," said the stranger, and I was startled to note that he spoke with a faint American accent, "but are you a literary man?"

As I had judged to be the case, he was slightly bemused, but by no means drunk, and although his question was abrupt it was spoken civilly enough.

"Journalism is one of the several occupations in which I have failed," I replied, lightly.

"You are not a fiction writer?"

"I lack the imagination necessary for that craft, sir."

The other wagged his head slowly and took a drink of whisky. "Nevertheless," he said, and raised his finger solemnly, "you were thinking that I resembled Edgar Allan Poe!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, for the man had really amazed me. "You clearly resemble him in more ways than one. I must really ask you to inform me how you deduced such a fact from a mere glance of mine."

"I will tell you, sir," he replied. "But, first, I must replenish my glass, and I should be honoured if you would permit me to replenish yours."

"Thanks very much," I said, "but I would rather you excused me."

"As you wish, sir," replied the American with grave courtesy, "as you wish."

He stepped up to the counter and rapped upon it with half a crown, until the landlady appeared. She treated me to a pathetic glance, but refilled the empty glass.

My American acquaintance having returned to his seat and having added a very little water to the whisky, went on:

"Now, sir," said he, "my name is Colin Camber, formerly of Richmond, Virginia, United States of America, but now of the Guest House, Surrey, England, at your service."

Taking my cue from Mr. Camber's gloomy but lofty manner, I bowed formally and mentioned my name.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Knox," he assured me; "and now, sir, to answer your question. When you came in a few moments ago you glanced at me. Your eyes did not open widely as is the case when one recognizes, or thinks one recognizes, an acquaintance, they narrowed. This indicated retrospection. For a moment they turned aside. You were focussing a fugitive idea, a memory. You captured it. You looked at me again, and your successive glances

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

read as follows: The hair worn uncommonly long, the mathematical brow, the eyes of a poet, the slight moustache, small mouth, weak chin; the glass at his elbow. The resemblance is complete. Knowing how complete it is myself, sir, I ventured to test my theory, and it proved to be sound."

Now, as Mr. Colin Camber had thus spoken in the serious manner of a slightly drunken man, I had formed the opinion that I stood in the presence of a very singular character. Here was that seeming mesalliance which not infrequently begets genius: a powerful and original mind allied to a weak will. I wondered what Mr. Colin Camber's occupation might be, and somewhat, too, I wondered why his name was unfamiliar to me. For that the possessor of that brow and those eyes could fail to make his mark in any profession which he might take up I was unwilling to believe.

"Your exposition has been very interesting, Mr. Camber," I said. "You are a singularly close observer, I perceive."

"Yes," he replied, "I have passed my life in observing the ways of my fellowmen, a study which I have pursued in various parts of the world without appreciable benefit to myself. I refer to financial benefit."

He contemplated me with a look which had grown suddenly pathetic.

"I would not have you think, sir," he added, "that I am an habitual toper. I have latterly been much upset by—domestic worries, and—er——" He emptied his glass at a draught. "Surely, Mr. Knox, you are going to replenish? Whilst you are doing so, would you kindly request Mrs. Wootton to extend the same favour to myself?"

But at that moment Mrs. Wootton in person ap-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

peared behind the counter. "Time, please, gentlemen," she said; "it is gone half-past two."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Camber, rising. "What is that? You decline to serve me, Mrs. Wootton?"

"Why, not at all, Mr. Camber," answered the landlady, "but I can serve no one now; it's after time."

"You decline to serve me," he muttered, his speech becoming slurred. "Am I, then, to be insulted?"

I caught a glance of entreaty from the landlady. "My dear sir," I said, genially, "we must bow to the law, I suppose. At least we are better off here than in America."

"Ah, that is true," agreed Mr. Camber, throwing his head back and speaking the words as though they possessed some deep dramatic significance. "Yes, but such laws are an insult to every intelligent man."

He sat down again rather heavily, and I stood looking from him to the landlady, and wondering what I should do. The matter was decided for me, however, in a way which I could never have foreseen. For, hearing a light footfall upon the step which led up to the bar-parlour, I turned—and there almost beside me stood a wrinkled little Chinaman!

He wore a blue suit and a tweed cap, he wore queer, thick-soled slippers, and his face was like a smiling mask hewn out of very old ivory. I could scarcely credit the evidence of my senses, since the Lavender Arms was one of the last places in which I should have looked for a native of China.

Mr. Colin Camber rose again, and fixing his melancholy eyes upon the newcomer:

"Ah Tsong," he said in a tone of cold anger, "what are you doing here?"

Quite unmoved the Chinaman replied:

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Blingee you chit, sir, vellee soon go back."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Camber. "Answer me, Ah Tsong: who sent you?"

"Lilly missee," crooned the Chinaman, smiling up into the other's face with a sort of childish entreaty. "Lilly missee."

"Oh," said Mr. Camber in a changed voice. "Oh."

He stood very upright for a moment, his gaze set upon the wrinkled Chinese face. Then he looked at Mrs. Wootton and bowed, and looked at me and bowed, very stiffly.

"I must excuse myself, sir," he announced. "My wife desires my presence at home."

I returned his bow, and as he walked quite steadily toward the door, followed by Ah Tsong, he paused, turned, and said: "Mr. Knox, I should esteem it a friendly action if you would spare me an hour of your company before you leave Surrey. My visitors are few. Any one, any one, will direct you to the Guest House. I am persuaded that we have much in common. Good-day, sir."

He went down the steps, disappearing in company with the Chinaman, and having watched them go, I turned to Mrs. Wootton, the landlady, in silent astonishment.

She nodded her head and sighed.

"The same every day and every evening for months past," she said. "I am afraid it's going to be the death of him."

"Do you mean that Mr. Camber comes here every day and is always fetched by the Chinaman?"

"Twice every day," corrected the landlady, "and his poor wife sends here regularly."

"What a tragedy," I muttered, "and such a brilliant man."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Ah," said she, busily removing jugs and glasses from the counter, "it does seem a terrible thing."

"Has Mr. Camber lived for long in this neighbourhood?" I ventured to inquire.

"It was about three years ago, sir, that he took the old Guest House at Mid-Hatton. I remember the time well enough because of all the trouble there was about him bringing a Chinaman down here."

"I can imagine it must have created something of a sensation," I murmured. "Is the Guest House a large property?"

"Oh, no, sir, only ten rooms and a garden, and it had been vacant for a long time. It belongs to what is called the Crayland Park Estate."

"Mr. Camber, I take it, is a literary man?"

"So I believe, sir."

Mrs. Wootton, having cleared the counter, glanced up at the clock and then at me with a cheery but significant smile.

"I see that it is after time," I said, returning the smile, "but the queer people who seem to live hereabouts interest me very much."

"I can't wonder at that, sir!" said the landlady, laughing outright. "Chinamen and Spanish men and what-not. If some of the old gentry that lived here before the war could see it, they wouldn't recognize the place, of that I am sure."

"Ah, well," said I, pausing at the step, "I shall hope to see more of Mr. Camber, and of yourself too, madam, for your ale is excellent."

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure," said the landlady much gratified, "but as to Mr. Camber, I really doubt if he would know you if you met him again. Not if he was sober, I mean."

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Really?"

"Oh, it's a fact, believe me. Just in the last six months or so he has started on the rampage like, but some of the people he has met in here and asked to call upon him have done it, thinking he meant it."

"And they have not been well received?" said I, lingering.

"They have had the door shut in their faces!" declared Mrs. Wootton with a certain indignation. "He either does not remember what he says or does when he is in drink, or he pretends he doesn't. Oh, dear, it's a funny world. Well, good-day, sir."

"Good-day," said I, and came out of the Lavender Arms full of sympathy with the views of the "old gentry," as outlined by Mrs. Wootton; for certainly it would seem that this quiet spot in the Surrey Hills had become a rallying ground for peculiar people.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER VIII

THE CALL OF M'KOMBO

OF TEA upon the veranda of Cray's Folly that afternoon I retain several notable memories. I got into closer touch with my host and hostess, without achieving anything like a proper understanding of either of them, and I procured a new viewpoint of Miss Val Beverley. Her repose was misleading. She deliberately subjugated her own vital personality to that of Madame de Stämer, why, I knew not, unless she felt herself under an obligation to do so. That her blue-gray eyes could be wistful was true enough, they could also be gay; and once I detected in them a look of sadness which dispelled the butterfly illusion belonging to her dainty slenderness, to her mobile lips, to the vagabond curling hair of russet brown.

Paul Harley's manner remained absent, but I who knew his moods so well recognized that this abstraction was no longer real. It was a pose which he often adopted when in reality he was keenly interested in his surroundings. It baffled me, however, as effectively as it baffled others, and whilst at one moment I decided that he was studying Colonel Menendez, in the next I became convinced that Madame de Stämer was the subject upon his mental dissecting table.

That he should find in Madame a fascinating problem did not surprise me. She must have afforded tempting study for any psychologist. I could not fathom the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

nature of the kinship existing between herself and the Spanish colonel, for Madame de Stämer was French to her fingertips. Her expressions, her gestures, her whole outlook on life proclaimed the fashionable Parisienne.

She possessed a vigorous masculine intelligence and was the most entertaining companion imaginable. She was daringly outspoken, and it was hard to believe that her gaiety was forced. Yet, as the afternoon wore on, I became more and more convinced that such was the case.

I thought that before affliction visited her Madame de Stämer must have been a vivacious and a beautiful woman. Her vivacity remained and much of her beauty, so that it was difficult to believe her snow-white hair to be a product of nature. Again and again I found myself regarding it as a powdered coiffure of the Pompadour period and wondering why Madame wore no patches.

That a deep and sympathetic understanding existed between herself and Colonel Menendez was unmistakable. More than once I intercepted glances from the dark eyes of Madame which were lover-like, yet laden with a profound sorrow. She was playing a rôle, and I was convinced that Harley knew this. It was not merely a courageous fight against affliction on the part of a woman of the world, versed in masking her real self from the prying eyes of society, it was a studied performance prompted by some deeper motive.

She dressed with exquisite taste, and to see her seated there amid her cushions, gesticulating vivaciously, one would never have supposed that she was crippled. My admiration for her momentarily increased, the more so since I could see that she was sincerely fond of Val Beverley, whose every movement

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"So would I, my dear," she confessed, "although I cannot walk. Without admiration there is"—she snapped her fingers—"nothing. And who would notice a linnet when a bird of paradise was about, however sweet her voice? Tell me that, my dear?"

Paul Harley aroused himself and laughed heartily.

"Yet," he said, "I think with Miss Beverley, that this love of elegance does not always make for happiness. Surely it is the cause of half the domestic tragedies in France?"

"Ah, the French love elegance," cried Madame, shrugging, "they cannot help it. To secure what is elegant a Frenchwoman will sometimes forget her husband, yes, but never forget herself."

"Really, Marie," protested the Colonel, "you say most strange things!"

"Is that so, Juan?" she replied, casting one of her queer glances in his direction; "but how would you like to be surrounded by a lot of drabs, eh? That man, Mr. Knox," she extended one white hand in the direction of Colonel Menendez, the fingers half closed, in a gesture which curiously reminded me of Sarah Bernhardt, "that man would notice if a parlourmaid came into the room with a shoe unbuttoned. Poof! if we love elegance it is because without it the men would never love *us*."

Colonel Menendez bent across the table and kissed the white fingers in his courtier-like fashion.

"My sweet cousin," he said, "I should love you in rags."

Madame smiled and flushed like a girl, but withdrawing her hand she shrugged.

"They would have to be *pretty* rags!" she added.

During this little scene I detected Val Beverley

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

looking at me in a vaguely troubled way, and it was easy to guess that she was wondering what construction I should place upon it. However:

"I am going into the town," declared Madame de Stämer, energetically. "Half the things ordered from Hartley's have never been sent."

"Oh, Madame, please let *me* go," cried Val Beverley.

"My dear," pronounced Madame, "I will not let you go, but I will let you come with me if you wish."

She rang a little bell which stood upon the tea-table beside the urn, and Pedro came out through the drawing room.

"Pedro," she said, "is the car ready?"

The Spanish butler bowed.

"Tell Carter to bring it round. Hurry, dear," to the girl, "if you are coming with me. I shall not be a minute."

Thereupon she whisked her mechanical chair about, waved her hand to dismiss Pedro, and went steering through the drawing room at a great rate, with Val Beverley walking beside her.

As we resumed our seats Colonel Menendez lay back with half-closed eyes, his glance following the chair and its occupant until both were swallowed up in the shadows of the big drawing room.

"Madame de Stämer is a very remarkable woman," said Paul Harley.

"Remarkable?" replied the Colonel. "The spirit of all the old chivalry of France is imprisoned within her, I think."

He passed cigarettes around, of a long kind resembling cheroots and wrapped in tobacco leaf. I thought it strange that having thus emphasized Madame's nationality he did not feel it incumbent upon

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

him to explain the mystery of their kinship. However, he made no attempt to do so, and almost before we had lighted up, a racy little two-seater was driven around the gravel path by Carter, the chauffeur who had brought us to Cray's Folly from London.

The man descended and began to arrange wraps and cushions, and a few moments later back came Madame again, dressed for driving. Carter was about to lift her into the car when Colonel Menendez stood up and advanced.

"Sit down, Juan, sit down!" said Madame, sharply.

A look of keen anxiety, I had almost said of pain, leapt into her eyes, and the Colonel hesitated.

"How often must I tell you," continued the throbbing voice, "that you must not exert yourself."

Colonel Menendez accepted the rebuke humbly, but the incident struck me as grotesque; for it was difficult to associate delicacy with such a fine specimen of well-preserved manhood as the Colonel.

However, Carter performed the duty of assisting Madame into her little car, and when for a moment he supported her upright, before placing her among the cushions, I noted that she was a tall woman, slender and elegant.

All smiles and light, sparkling conversation, she settled herself comfortably at the wheel and Val Beverley got in beside her. Madame nodded to Carter in dismissal, waved her hand to Colonel Menendez, cried "Au revoir!," and then away went the little car, swinging around the angle of the house and out of sight.

Our host stood bare-headed upon the veranda listening to the sound of the engine dying away among the trees. He seemed to be lost in reflection from which

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

he only aroused himself when the purr of the motor became inaudible.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, and suppressed a sigh, "we have much to talk about. This spot is cool, but is it sufficiently private? Perhaps, Mr. Harley, you would prefer to talk in the library?"

Paul Harley flicked ash from the end of his cigarette.

"Better still in your own study, Colonel Menendez," he replied.

"What, do you suspect eavesdroppers?" asked the Colonel, his manner becoming momentarily agitated.

He looked at Harley as though he suspected the latter of possessing private information.

"We should neglect no possible precaution," answered my friend. "That agencies inimical to your safety are focussed upon the house your own statement amply demonstrates."

Colonel Menendez seemed to be on the point of speaking again, but he checked himself and in silence led the way through the ornate library to a smaller room which opened out of it, and which was furnished as a study.

Here the motif was distinctly one of officialdom. Although the Southern element was not lacking, it was not so marked as in the library or in the hall. The place was appointed for utility rather than ornament. Everything was in perfect order. In the library, with the blinds drawn, one might have supposed oneself in Trinidad; in the study, under similar conditions, one might equally well have imagined Downing Street to lie outside the windows. Essentially, this was the workroom of a man of affairs.

Having settled ourselves comfortably, Paul Harley opened the conversation.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"In several particulars," said he, "I find my information to be incomplete."

He consulted the back of an envelope, upon which, I presumed during the afternoon, he had made a number of pencilled notes.

"For instance," he continued, "your detection of someone watching the house, and subsequently of someone forcing an entrance, had no visible association with the presence of the bat wing attached to your front door?"

"No," replied the Colonel, slowly, "these episodes took place a month ago."

"Exactly a month ago?"

"They took place immediately before the last full moon."

"Ah, before the full moon. And because you associate the activities of Voodoo with the full moon, you believe that the old menace has again become active?"

The Colonel nodded emphatically. He was busily engaged in rolling one of his eternal cigarettes.

"This belief of yours was recently confirmed by the discovery of the bat wing?"

"I no longer doubted," said Colonel Menendez, shrugging his shoulders. "How could I?"

"Quite so," murmured Harley, absently, and evidently pursuing some private train of thought. "And now, I take it that your suspicions, if expressed in words, would amount to this: During your last visit to Cuba you (*a*) either killed some high priest of Voodoo, or (*b*) seriously injured him? Assuming the first theory to be the correct one, your death was determined upon by the sect over which he had formerly presided. Assuming the second to be accurate, however, it is presumably the man himself for whom we must look. Now, Colonel

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Menendez, kindly inform me if you recall the name of this man?"

"I recall it very well," replied the Colonel. "His name was M'kombo, and he was a Benin negro."

"Assuming that he is still alive, what, roughly, would his age be to-day?"

The Colonel seemed to meditate, pushing a box of long Martinique cigars across the table in my direction.

"He would be an old man," he pronounced. "I, myself, am fifty-two, and I should say that M'kombo if alive to-day would be nearer to seventy than sixty."

"Ah," murmured Harley, "and did he speak English?"

"A few words, I believe."

Paul Harley fixed his gaze upon the dark, aquiline face.

"In short," he said, "do you really suspect that it was M'kombo whose shadow you saw upon the lawn, who a month ago made a midnight entrance into Cray's Folly, and who recently pinned a bat wing to the door?"

Colonel Menendez seemed somewhat taken aback by this direct question. "I cannot believe it," he confessed.

"Do you believe that this order or religion of Voodooism has any existence outside those places where African negroes or descendents of negroes are settled?"

"I should not have been prepared to believe it, Mr. Harley, prior to my experiences in Washington and elsewhere."

"Then you do believe that there are representatives of this cult to be met with in Europe and America?"

"I should have been prepared to believe it possible in America, for in America there are many negroes, but in England——"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Again he shrugged his shoulders.

"I would remind you," said Harley, quietly, "that there are also quite a number of negroes in England. If you seriously believe Voodoo to follow negro migration, I can see no objection to assuming it to be a universal cult."

"Such an idea is incredible."

"Yet by what other hypothesis," asked Harley, "are we to cover the facts of your own case as stated by yourself? Now," he consulted his pencilled notes, "there is another point. I gather that these African sorcerers rely largely upon what I may term intimidation. In other words, they claim the power of wishing an enemy to death."

He raised his eyes and stared grimly at the Colonel.

"I should not like to suppose that a man of your courage and culture could subscribe to such a belief."

"I do not, sir," declared the Colonel, warmly. "No Obeah man could ever exercise his will upon *me!*"

"Yet, if I may say so," murmured Harley, "your will to live seems to have become somewhat weakened."

"What do you mean?"

Colonel Menendez stood up, his delicate nostrils dilated. He glared angrily at Harley.

"I mean that I perceive a certain resignation in your manner of which I do not approve."

"You do not *approve?*" said Colonel Menendez, softly; and I thought as he stood looking down upon my friend that I had rarely seen a more formidable figure.

Paul Harley had roused him unaccountably, and knowing my friend for a master of tact I knew also that this had been deliberate, although I could not even dimly perceive his object.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I occupy the position of a specialist," Harley continued, "and you occupy that of my patient. Now, you cannot disguise from me that your mental opposition to this danger which threatens has become slackened. Allow me to remind you that the strongest defence is counter-attack. You are angry, Colonel Menendez, but I would rather see you angry than apathetic. To come to my last point. You spoke of a neighbour in terms which led me to suppose that you suspected him of some association with your enemies. May I ask for the name of this person?"

Colonel Menendez sat down again, puffing furiously at his cigarette, whilst beginning to roll another. He was much disturbed, was fighting to regain mastery of himself.

"I apologize from the bottom of my heart," he said, "for a breach of good behaviour which really was unforgivable. I was angry when I should have been grateful. Much that you have said is true. Because it is true, I despise myself."

He flashed a glance at Paul Harley.

"Awake," he continued, "I care for no man breathing, black or white; but *asleep*"—he shrugged his shoulders. "It is in sleep that these dealers in unclean things obtain their advantage."

"You excite my curiosity," declared Harley.

"Listen," Colonel Menendez bent forward, resting his elbows upon his knees. Between the yellow fingers of his left hand he held the newly completed cigarette whilst he continued to puff vigorously at the old one. "You recollect my speaking of the death of a certain native girl?"

Paul Harley nodded.

The real cause of her death was never known, but I

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

obtained evidence to show that on the night after the wing of a bat had been attached to her hut, she wandered out in her sleep and visited the Black Belt. Can you doubt that someone was calling her?"

"Calling her?"

"Mr. Harley, she was obeying the call of M'kombo!"

"The *call* of M'kombo? You refer to some kind of hypnotic suggestions?"

"I illustrate," replied the Colonel, "to help to make clear something which I have to tell you. On the night when last the moon was full—on the night after someone had entered the house—I had retired early to bed. Suddenly I awoke, feeling very cold. I awoke, I say, and where do you suppose I found myself?"

"I am all anxiety to hear."

"On the point of entering the Tudor garden—you call it Tudor garden?—which is visible from the window of your room!"

"Most extraordinary," murmured Harley; "and you were in your night attire?"

"I was."

"And what had awakened you?"

"An accident. I believe a lucky accident. I had cut my bare foot upon the gravel and the pain awakened me."

"You had no recollection of any dream which had prompted you to go down into the garden?"

"None whatever."

"Does your room face in that direction?"

"It does not. It faces the lake on the south of the house. I had descended to a side door, unbarred it, and walked entirely around the east wing before I awakened."

"Your room faces the lake," murmured Harley.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Yes."

Their glances met, and in Paul Harley's expression there seemed to be a challenge.

"You have not yet told me," said he, "the name of your neighbour."

Colonel Menendez lighted his new cigarette.

"Mr. Harley," he confessed, "I regret that I ever referred to this suspicion of mine. Indeed it is hardly a suspicion, it is what I may call a desperate doubt. Do you say that, a desperate doubt?"

"I think I follow you," said Harley.

"The fact is this, I only know of one person within ten miles of Cray's Folly who has ever visited Cuba."

"Ah."

"I have no other scrap of evidence to associate him with my shadowy enemy. This being so, you will pardon me if I ask you to forget that I ever referred to his existence."

He spoke the words with a sort of lofty finality, and accompanied them with a gesture of the hands which really left Harley no alternative but to drop the subject.

Again their glances met, and it was patent to me that underlying all this conversation was something beyond my ken. What it was that Harley suspected I could not imagine, nor what it was that Colonel Menendez desired to conceal; but tension was in the very air. The Spaniard was on the defensive, and Paul Harley was puzzled, irritated.

It was a strange interview, and one which in the light of after events I recognized to possess extraordinary significance. That sixth sense of Harley's was awake, was prompting him, but to what extent he understood its promptings at that hour I did not know,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

and have never known to this day. Intuitively, I believe, as he sat there staring at Colonel Menendez, he began to perceive the shadow within a shadow which was the secret of Cray's Folly, which was the thing called Bat Wing, which was the devilish force at that very hour alive and potent in our midst.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER IX

OBEAH

THIS conversation in Colonel Menendez's study produced a very unpleasant impression upon my mind. The atmosphere of Cray's Folly seemed to become charged with unrest. Of Madame de Stämer and Miss Beverley I saw nothing up to the time that I retired to dress. Having dressed I walked into Harley's room, anxious to learn if he had formed any theory to account for the singular business which had brought us to Surrey.

Harley had excused himself directly we had left the study, stating that he wished to get to the village post-office in time to send a telegram to London. Our host had suggested a messenger, but this, as well as the offer of a car, Harley had declined, saying that the exercise would aid reflection. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find his room empty, for I could not imagine why the sending of a telegram should have detained him so long.

Dusk was falling, and viewed from the open window the Tudor garden below looked very beautiful, part of it lying in a sort of purplish shadow and the rest being mystically lighted as though viewed through a golden veil. To the whole picture a sort of magic quality was added by a speck of high-light which rested upon the face of the old sun-dial.

I thought that here was a fit illustration for a fairy tale; then I remembered the Colonel's account of how he

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY