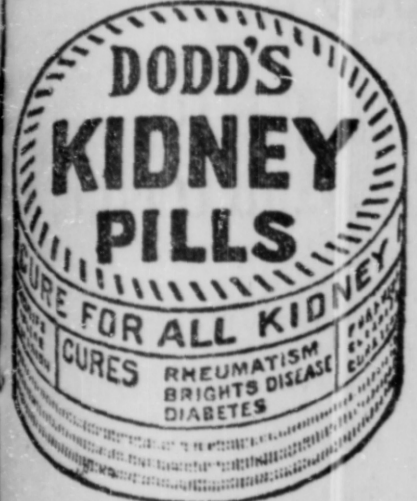


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"I thought of that, of course," said the detective calmly. "A newly-fallen meteorite, superheated as it must be, would undoubtedly sear human flesh, so that traces of it would probably be discernible, even after the burned part had been submerged in water for several hours. I never for a moment believed that the meteorite made the wound. If you remember, I said that this corner of the meteorite might make a break almost exactly like that in the skull. Almost exactly, but not quite. It fits the wound pretty well, certainly much better than the handle of that stick, but it doesn't fit it quite accurately enough. Things have to be exact in matters of this sort to be of much value. Now here is a rock," picking up the fragment broken from the cliff, "that fills our wants better. This singular shaped corner fits the wound exactly, and here, gentlemen, undoubtedly is the instrument that caused the death of Burke. The meteorite struck the rock just as the doomed man was climbing the path and bounded off into the water without doing further damage itself. The fatal destructiveness lay in this piece of rock, which being broken from the solid rock with great violence was dashed against Burke's head, knocking him off the path into the river and then falling in after him. The body, borne away by the current, which at this point sets to ward the opposite shore, would by the next morning be likely to reach the spot where the fishermen found it. Some water was found in Burke's lungs, enough to make the medical men believe that death occurred from drowning, yet probably not enough gained entrance before his death to make the specific gravity of the body greater than that of the water, which explains why the body floated instead of sinking. "Gentlemen, do you think my theory is correct?"

A buzz of admiration followed, and Arnold began to clap his hands. There was a singular look in Professor Gilman's eyes as he noticed this.

"Mr. Fosdick," said the sheriff enthusiastically, all his reluctance to acknowledge the professional superiority of the other disappearing, "you are a most remarkable man. Your explanation is complete and satisfactory, and this mystery, thanks to your skill as a detective, is cleared up."

CHAPTER VIII. PROFESSOR GILMAN HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

"Permit me to say a few words." It was Professor Gilman who spoke. Every one present, a little startled at his tone, turned to look at him. He said:

"Mr. Fosdick is a remarkable man. I fully agree with the sheriff on that point. His theory of Burke's death is likewise remarkable. I may say almost too remarkable. Gentlemen, there probably is not one chance in a hundred million of a man meeting death in the



The old-fashioned watchman who prowled about the streets of medieval London, with a lantern in his hand to proclaim his coming, and who announced his passage through the streets by shouting "All's well," was a very inefficient protector when compared with the metropolitan police of New York City, commonly known as the "Finest." The modern policeman does not proclaim his coming to the evil doer by shouting or by carrying a lantern. He does his work more quietly and effectively than the old-fashioned town watchman.

It is thus that in all the walks of life and in all occupations, times change and knowledge and efficiency increase. In this respect medical science has kept pace with the advance in other lines. Physicians and chemists have grown rapidly more skillful. There are medicinal preparations nowadays that cure diseases that were a few years ago considered absolutely incurable. The final triumph in this respect is Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. It was first given to the world thirty years ago, and has stood the test ever since that time. It cures 98 per cent. of all cases of consumption, bronchial, throat and kindred affections. Thousands who were hopeless sufferers, and had been given up by the doctors, have testified to its marvelous merits. It is the great blood-maker and flesh-builder. It makes the appetite hearty, the digestion and assimilation perfect, the liver active, the blood pure and rich with the life-giving elements of the food, and the nerves strong and steady. It acts directly on the lungs and air-passages, driving out all impurities and disease germs. An honest dealer will not try to persuade you to take an inferior substitute for the sake of a few pennies added profit. Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets cure constipation. At all medicine stores.

manner just described. That fact alone makes it almost if not quite necessary to abandon such a theory, a theory which, I admit, is peculiarly fascinating. At one time its fascination lured me. I had constructed a theory substantially like the one that has just been explained and was preparing to gather evidence in support of it when I accidentally learned that Mr. Fosdick was working along the same line of thought. I came here today wishing to learn if he had followed the road to its end, but I perceive that he has stopped somewhat short of his destination. Before proceeding further I will ask you, Mr. Sheriff, to place Mr. Arnold under arrest for the murder of Burke."

Each member of the company was visibly astonished at these words. The detective had put some gum in his mouth when the professor began talking and swallowed it in his astonishment. But he did not wince, and no one noticed it. Arnold was observed to turn pale.

Professor Gilman, continuing, said: "I agree perfectly with Mr. Fosdick as to the instrument that made the wound on Burke's skull. It was undoubtedly this fragment of rock. Before Mr. Fosdick examined the ridge near the pier I had carefully scrutinized it and discovered, as he afterward did, that a piece of rock had been broken off. I marked the place with a stick, which I have no doubt Mr. Fosdick remembers having seen there afterward."

Fosdick nodded and said, "Go on." He evidently was greatly interested.

Professor Gilman resumed, and as he proceeded his usually mild manner became unusually emphatic.

"This fragment, as I say, doubtless was the instrument that made the wound, but that it was hurled at Burke by the blind and motiveless forces of nature I deny most emphatically. I do not say such a thing could not happen. It could. And there lies the allurements, the fascination of the idea. What I contend is that it wouldn't happen—not in a thousand years—nay, nor in ten thousand. It is too unusual. The percentage of its probability as against its improbability is too infinitesimal. Therefore—and I admit, with some reluctance—I rejected the theory and traveled a little further along the line of thought I had started on."

"I returned to the footprints on the road between the hotel and the west pier and asked myself: 'What was Burke searching for? Was it really a rod of steel? One of those rods can be bought for a few cents. Their immediate need at the observatory was not urgent. Therefore, even supposing he had dropped one without noticing it—a thing really not very likely to occur—I doubted if, upon discovering the loss, he would spend any time looking for it. But if it was not the steel, what was he searching for? I could not think of anything that Burke would be likely to discover missing as he walked along in the dark. If he did not know that he had lost something, of course he would not be looking for anything. So, as in fancy I walked along with him trying to think of something he should discover missing, I found myself presently at the west pier, where the boat was secured with chain and padlock, just as he had left it earlier in the evening. Then I seemed to know, as clearly as if I had been there in fact instead of fancy, what he had lost. It was his bunch of keys, of course. When the body was discovered, they were found in his hip pocket together with a pocket handkerchief. Somewhere on the road, then, he had pulled out his handkerchief and the keys with it. His deafness doubtless prevented his hearing them rattle as they fell to the ground. The padlock was especially prized by Burke, and he would not willingly break it. Rather than do so he would walk a considerable distance. Besides, there were other keys than the one to the padlock on the ring which he would not want to lose."

"Having reached this conclusion, I obtained a wax impression of Burke's shoe heel, and went to the west pier to examine the ground. On my way I saw Mr. Fosdick's submarine diver at work and was confident I knew what he was searching for. Many footprints were in the soft clay around the landing by the time I got there, but I managed to distinguish among them those made by Burke the night of his death. I could not, however, ascertain what I wanted to in the immediate vicinity of the pier, owing to the confusion of footprints, but passing up the road a few rods I was rewarded. Among the other footprints I could distinguish those made by Burke, and lo! there were two sets of footprints going in each direction. Consequently, Burke must have gone over that road twice that night instead of once. Between the spot where the burned matches were found and the hotel there was but one set of Burke's

footprints. Therefore, it was the space between the pier and the spot where the search was made that he traversed twice. It was clear that this double journey had not been made early in the evening on his way to Jackson, for at that hour it was yet light, whereas the presence of the burned matches shows that it was dark when the search was made. These facts confirmed my belief that it was his keys he had lost. Presumably Burke, conjecturing in what manner he had lost them, remembered about where he had used his handkerchief, for the evidences do not show that he hunted for any great distance along the road. The place where the search was made is about two-thirds, or perhaps three-fourths, of a mile from the west pier. Some of you may be asking yourselves: 'What has all this to do with the case? What part of Mr. Fosdick's theory does it conflict with?' I perceive, however, by the expression of Mr. Fosdick's face that he realizes of what vast importance it is. He would tell you, as I now tell you, that its importance lies in the matter of time."

(To be Continued.)

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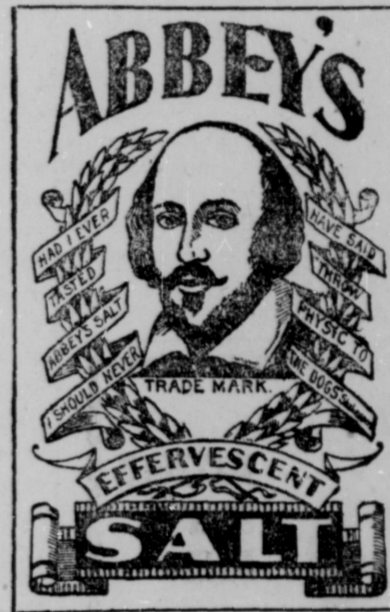
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