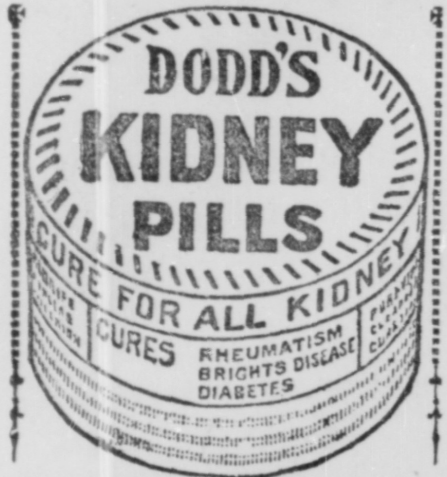


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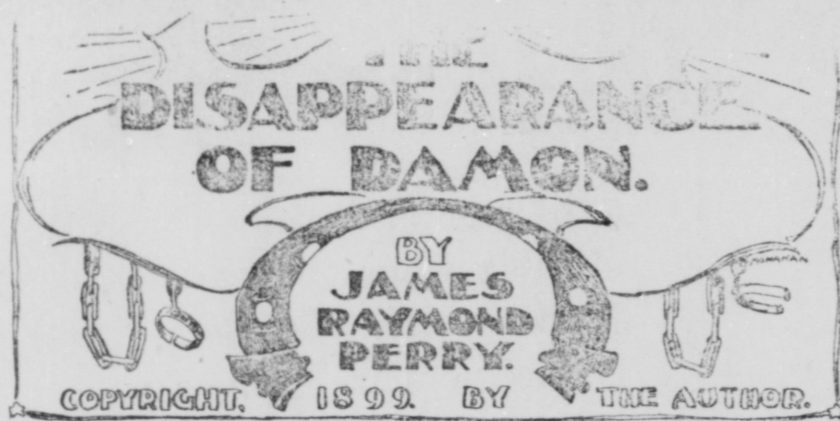
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(Continued.)

"I interviewed the servant girl who answered the man's ring that night. Her manner struck me as that of one who might know more than she had told and who feared questioning. The only description that she had given of the man was in regard to his height. He was tall. Why she told that much I am unable to say. That of itself could have furnished small clue to the identity of the caller. There are many tall men. But one particular tall man I had in mind as the possible caller. Why I had him in mind will appear later.

"Going upon the assumption that this man was the caller, I questioned the servant and surprised her into the statement that she had recognized the caller, but for reasons that had seemed to her sufficient had chosen not to tell the police. That man was the one whom I have designated as the chief conspirator. He is sitting with us in this room, and you have, of course, guessed whom I mean. It is Mr. Rice."

"Yes, professor. I was the caller there that night," confessed Ben Rice. "Your narrative is very interesting. I am waiting to learn how you propose to connect me with the murder. As a precautionary measure, it might be well for Mr. Hopper to handcuff me if he happens to have a pair of bracelets with him."

"It is quite unnecessary," replied Professor Gilman coolly. "Because you happened to call for Mr. Damon and because he left the house with you does not necessarily prove that you had a hand in killing him. Indeed I will say right here, lest some present may be harboring unjust suspicions, that Mr. Rice is entirely guiltless of the murder of his friend."

Josephine Maxwell and her mother looked greatly relieved at this. Rice and the students looked puzzled. The professor indulged in his wintry smile.

"I have called Mr. Rice the chief conspirator. I believe the appellation to be apt. Mr. Sexton here is another of the conspirators. Nutt and one or two others were also engaged in the conspiracy. Yet none of them is responsible for the crime. There was still another conspirator whose name I have not told, and he was the one who made away with Damon. That man was Damon himself."

There was an impressive silence, during which the sound of a cough in the next room was distinctly audible.

"Do you mean," asked Josephine Maxwell, perplexed and with a grave look on her face, "that Luther Damon committed suicide?"

**CHAPTER V.**

"That," said Professor Gilman, "brings us to the subject of the discovery made in the basement of 439 Taylor street. The body found there had been decapitated. It would, of course, be extravagant to suppose that a suicide could discover means of beheading himself and hiding his head in some place



When Lady Marie Wortley Montague visited the household of the Sultan, she wrote home to England that the ladies of the harem were smothered with laughter to discover that her ladyship wore an inner vest of steel and whalebone, tight, impenetrable and stifling, in other words, a corset. The ladies of the harem would no doubt have been equally astonished, though perhaps not disposed to laughter, had they known that the women of western nations, through false ideas of delicacy, suffer in silence untold agony, and sometimes death, through neglect of their health in a womanly way. Women, who suffer in this way shrink from the embarrassing examinations and local treatment insisted upon by the majority of physicians. If they only knew it, there is no necessity for these ordeals. An eminent and skillful physician long since discovered a remedy that women may use in the privacy of their own homes. It is Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. It acts directly on the feminine organism, giving it strength, vigor and elasticity. It stops all debilitating drains. It is the greatest of all nerve tonics and invigorators for women. Thousands of women who were weak, sickly, petulant and despondent invalids are to-day happy and healthy as the result of the use of this wonderful medicine. Good druggists do not advise substitutes for this incomparable remedy.

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where it could not be found and his body in another and difficult hiding place. So, at the risk of puzzling Miss Maxwell yet more, I am afraid I shall have to say that the idea of suicide had not occurred to me.

"The condition in which that body was found furnished the clue to the whole case. I am surprised that the clue has not occurred to all of you. Perhaps it has to some of you. The one startling fact that stood out above all others was not that the body was headless, but rather why it was headless.

"Can you conceive any possible reason for the murderer beheading his victim? You might venture the theory that it was for the purpose of destroying his identity. That would be the natural thought and also the reasonable one except for the other facts in the case. It is these other facts that make it impossible to believe it. A murderer seeking to destroy the identity of his victim would never leave his victim's body clothed in apparel that would identify him just as surely and swiftly as his face could do it. Yet we find that this body was so clothed. It had upon it a suit that several different persons could swear was Damon's, but to set all doubt at rest, on the vest was the tailor's mark, bearing the name of Damon—proof conclusive that the suit was his. There were, moreover, other articles on the body to identify it. There was the intaglio ring with an old English 'D' cut in the stone, and engraved on the inside of the band were the initials 'M. L. D.' Damon's friends could swear the ring was his; also in one of the pockets was found a cardcase containing six cards engraved with the name 'Mr. Martin Luther Damon.' It could scarcely be questioned whose property this was.

"Quite as remarkable as the things found on the body was the absence of certain other articles. Damon's watch and pocketbook were not found. Those, of course, might have been stolen, though the theory held by the police did not embrace theft as a motive for the crime. But the man's keys, his pocket-knife, his match safe—it seems Damon

was a smoker and carried one—every his lead pencil—every student carries one—were missing. Most singular of all, not even a pocket handkerchief was found in the pockets. It is idle to suppose a man in Damon's class would be without a handkerchief. Yet all those articles were missing—a most remarkable circumstance, I maintain. Every article found could be used for purposes of identification. Not an article was found that could not aid in doing that, not any one of a dozen trifles that might belong to one man as well as another. In fact, you might say that the body suffered from overidentification. It was enough to arouse suspicion.

"And yet over against these circumstances to prove the man's identity was the missing head—removed presumably for the purpose of destroying identity seemingly two opposing circumstances.

"That the head had been removed for the purpose of destroying the identity I entertained no doubt in spite of the easily identified articles found upon the body. Inasmuch as the murderer would not be foolish enough to seek to both destroy and preserve the identity of his victim, there was but one reasonable deduction to be made, and I have no doubt many of you have made it—namely, that the body found was not the body of Damon.

"It was equally clear that it was intended to be taken for his body. Damon's clothing and other property being witness to that.

"If not Damon's body, then whose was it? That was the next question to be answered. It did not look too difficult. You must bear in mind that I had already formulated a theory, which was helpful to me in indicating the course to pursue. I visited the public reading room and looked through the files of daily papers bearing date some days prior to Wednesday. At last I found what I was looking for. It was a brief item stating that on Monday an unknown man had been run down by a train at a street crossing and fatally injured. He had been removed to Mercy hospital, the item stated.

"I next paid a visit to Mercy hospital and there was permitted to see the hospital record of the unknown man. He had never recovered consciousness and died Tuesday night.

"I ought to state here that, after visiting the undertaker's Saturday in company with Mr. Rice and Mr. Sexton, I returned and made a careful examination of the corpse. I discovered that the big toe and the second toe of the left foot had been cut off. The amputation was an old one. The hospital record showed that the same members were missing from the body of the unknown man who had died there Tuesday. I had expected to learn that, for I was convinced that the body found in the vacant house in Taylor street

was probably that of the unknown man killed by the train.

"I was also given, though somewhat reluctantly, the information that the hospital sometimes furnished cadavers for the use of surgical practice by students and professors at Rusk college. Whether the cadaver of the unknown man had been removed there for that purpose I was not told. I did not care to be. I knew.

"And now we come to the conspiracy which I have mentioned. Mr. Rice I have named the chief conspirator. After calling for Mr. Damon Wednesday night the two went directly to Rusk college, I assume. Nutt and Sexton were also there, and other students also perhaps. I don't know how many. From the college Nutt and Damon went to the house in Taylor street. They waited outside till some one happened along who would be sure to recognize them, and then they entered the house under that person's observation. Nutt had a key to the house, which explains why that house was chosen. Later in the evening Rice, Sexton and as many more as may have been required went to the house, taking with them the cadaver from the hospital. This house is so situated that it may be approached from an alley in the rear with little danger of being observed by neighbors. A church stands next to it on one side, and the brick barn of the house on the other side shields the approach from that direction. So it may not be wondered at that no one has come forward with a story about seeing them enter it from the rear.

(To be Continued.)

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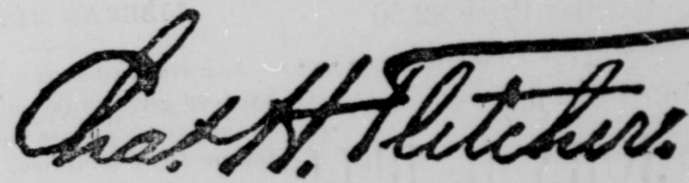
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