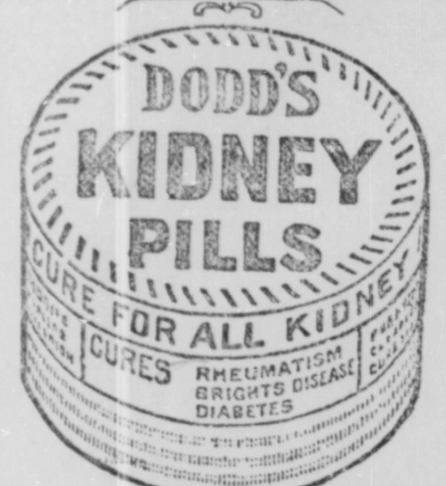


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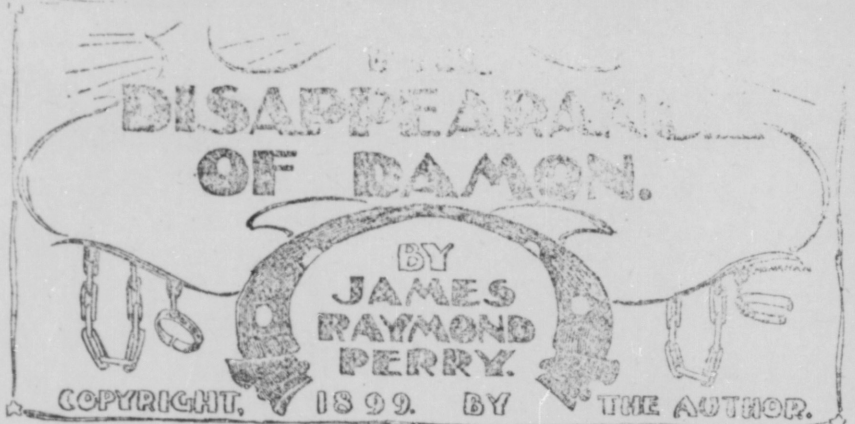
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(Continued.) "No, sir." "It may easily enough be explained, though," said the professor. He may have sent one of the suits to his tailor for pressing and cleaning. That would account for its absence."



"It was Mr. Rice who called, was it not?" Professor Gilman persisted. "that you came up here that night to tell Mr. Damon that Mr. Somebody wanted to see him. You stopped before speaking the name. Do you mind telling me what name you were about to utter?"

The girl's face grew red and then whitened, but she made no answer. "You might have fancied the caller resembled some person that you knew," said the professor reassuringly, "and inadvertently have been about to mention his name to Mr. Damon. Such things sometimes happen, you know."

The professor's tone was encouraging and his manner such as to inspire confidence. The poor girl looked sorely puzzled, but remained silent. "For instance," said the professor, "in the dim light this tall young man with smooth face and smiling mouth might have reminded you strongly of some one—of Mr. Rice, say—whom you have often seen with Mr. Damon and whom you would in all likelihood recognize even in a shadow. He might have reminded you of him, and your impression that it was he might have been so strong that when you came up here that night you may have said to Mr. Damon, 'Mr. Rice is down at the door waiting for you.'"

A frightened look had come into the girl's face, and she took hold of a chair near her. "As a matter of fact," continued Professor Gilman, "isn't that precisely what you did do? Your impression then was and still is that the man who called for Mr. Damon that night was

his friend Benjamin Rice. The mild manner of the professor had given place to sternness, and the girl began to sob. "It was Mr. Rice who called, was it not?" Professor Gilman persisted. "Yes, sir," said the girl and sobbed yet louder.

"There, my girl, there," said the professor soothingly. "Don't feel bad. Mr. Rice told you not to tell any one, I suppose. But don't feel concerned because you have told me. I give you my word that I believe Mr. Rice will get into no serious trouble through your confession. Do not tell him, nor any one, that you have told me it was he who called. It is just as well to keep it a secret for awhile longer."

And with that the professor departed, and as he walked back toward the boarding house in Somerset street he smiled more than once at something that pleased him hugely.

CHAPTER IV. At the dinner table that night the professor was quite talkative, but his conversation was about matters foreign to the work that had engaged him in the afternoon.

However, the students were naturally curious to know what his observations thus far had led him to think, and at last Ben Rice asked: "Well, Professor Gilman, have you formed any opinion yet as to who killed Damon and why it was done?"

Professor Gilman was very deliberate about replying—so deliberate, in fact, that the students began to think he was not going to make any reply, and Josephine Maxwell, looking at him, thought he could not have heard the question. She was about to call his attention to it when the professor opened his lips. "My observations thus far," said he, "as you know, have not been very extensive. I have learned, in the course of a somewhat protracted career, that it is well not to form judgments hastily. A circumstance or even two or three circumstances in conjunction may seem to point strongly to a certain conclusion, and that conclusion afterward prove to be wholly erroneous. Hence it is best not to reach a conclusion until one has made a thorough study in all its various aspects of a question under consideration."

"I may say that in this matter of Mr. Damon's disappearance I have noted circumstances that to my mind seem to point to a certain conclusion. In the light of all that I have learned thus far this conclusion seems right and reasonable. But, as I said a moment ago, my observations have been limited. The circumstances that I have noted are comparatively few, and it were perhaps unwise to base a final conclusion upon them. Further study of the case, bringing to it new light and additional circumstances, might give it a wholly different aspect. In view of such a possibility I prefer not to express an opinion at this time, nor indeed until I have looked carefully into certain matters that thus far I have lacked time to give my attention to."

tal. He remained there about 15 minutes and then returned to his boarding place.

At the dinner table nothing was said about the Damon mystery. The matter had been pretty thoroughly talked over in all its phases before this, and after what Professor Gilman had said the night before no one felt like asking him for his opinion. If he had reached a definite conclusion, he would tell them, they thought. Meanwhile they would not bother him with questions.

When dinner was about over, somewhat to the surprise of the boarders the professor said: "Mr. Rice, if you and such of your friends as are specially interested in this Damon business will come to my room about 8 o'clock tomorrow night I think I shall have a theory to offer. I will not say the theory will be correct, though I believe you will be interested in listening to what I have to say."

For the rest of the day the professor made himself agreeable to Mrs. Maxwell and her daughter, and so far as was apparent, had entirely dismissed from his mind all thought of the case that he had recently been at work on. (To be continued.)

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