



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

AMAZING STORIES

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In Our Next Issue:

THE UNIVERSE WRECKERS, by Edmond Hamilton. (A serial in 3 parts) Part I. We are inclined to take everything for granted—particularly the courses of Nature. There is, after all, no absolute assurance that the sun, for instance, should continue indefinitely to turn at its present speed. What would be the final result of the centrifugal force if the sun started to turn more and more rapidly? What would happen to the planets which rotate around this great luminary? Mr. Hamilton needs no introduction, but we do want to say that this surpasses the best interplanetary story by him that we have yet published. Read the first instalment in the May issue.

MADNESS OF THE DUST, by R. F. Starzl. Although this story was written some time ago, an extract taken from "The New York Times" of December 21, 1929, gives almost word for word a similar description of an operation performed by a ship's Captain, following radio instructions from a physician. How then, can we say anything is impossible? But this is only an incident in an unusual story, excellently told, and which contains a good bit of science.

THE IVY WAR, by David H. Keller, M.D. Here is a new story by Dr. Keller, based on the always interesting subject of botany, dealing with a subject that is little known as yet. The "Ivy War" goes on in the good old Keller manner, which some of our readers seemed to have missed recently. It is absorbingly interesting and plausible, without.

SYNTHETIC, by Charles Cloukey. By this time, Mr. Cloukey has become a familiar and well-liked author in *AMAZING STORIES*. In this story, he offers us an exceedingly clever, swift-moving aviation exploit of the future that shows good imagination and excellent knowledge of his subject. (Crowded out of the last issue.)

THE NON-GRAVITATIONAL VORTEX, by A. Hyatt Verrill. Here is another of Mr. Verrill's extraordinary scientific tales, based on the local annihilation of gravitation.

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Our Cover

This issue depicts a scene from the story entitled, "The Conquest of the Earth," by Isaac R. Nathanson, in which the representative of the strange intelligent beings from the nebula of Andromeda is pointing out to the unsuspecting earth people, on a screened easel-like stand, on which it has a picture of the nebula, just where they come from.

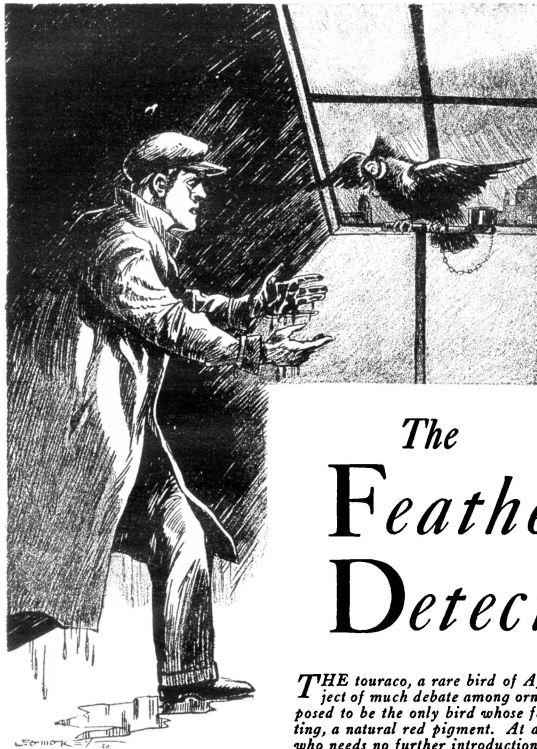
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By

A. Hyatt
Verrill

Author of "Into
the Green Prism,"
"Beyond the North
Pole," etc.

Illustrated
by
MOREY



The Feathered Detective

THE touraco, a rare bird of Africa, has been a subject of much debate among ornithologists. It is supposed to be the only bird whose feathers yield, on wetting, a natural red pigment. At any rate, Mr. Verrill, who needs no further introduction to readers of AMAZING STORIES, has some definite theories on this subject, based on careful study and investigation. And under his skilful handling "The Feathered Detective" takes on an individuality that easily puts it on an equal footing with the best scientific detective story.

¶ It became quite obvious, when I looked at the bird, that the murder had been committed before the bird was killed.

BEN POLLARD owned the Blue Lion Inn at Hobham, but nobody in the village really knew anything about Big Ben, as he was called. Not that there was any question that he owned the Blue Lion, for he had bought it from old John Blaber, paying for it with good Bank of England notes and gold sovereigns. It had been the "White Lion"

then, and Big Ben's first act, after the bill of sale and the deeds had been signed, was characteristic of the man.

Cocking his head to one side, thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, he had squinted up at the weather-beaten sign with its white lion rampant on a faded black background.

"White Lion," he had observed, speaking to no one

in particular. "White Lions and Black Lions all about. I'll lay a quid to a farthing there's one in the next village."

"Two on 'em," vouchsafed old Andy Prout, nodding his bald head sagely. "An' anither to Clacton."

"Aye, an' one over to Ripley, an' the Black Lion to Church Poges," added Sam Ryder. "Aye, the's plenty on 'em hereabouts."

Big Ben spat. "Thicker'n ticks on a sheep," he rumbled. "White Lions and Black Lions and Red Lions all over the bloom'n' place. I ain't never seed a willage without 'em, an' I'm a keen un for pubs at that. But never a Blue Lion nowheres, an' this pub's agoin' to be the Blue Lion arter now. Aye, I'll bet two quid to a ha'penny there ben't another Blue Lion in the whole United Kingdom o' Englan', Irelan', Scotlan' an' Wales. So one o' ye run along an' fetch the sign-painter for to paint yon lion blue once an' for all. An' mind there's a ha'pint to the lad as gets here with him first."

Still, as I said in the beginning, nobody really knew anything about Big Ben; who he was, whence he came, or even if his name really was Ben Pollard. He had arrived on the Portsmouth motor-coach one wild night, bundled up in a great sea-coat against the wind and slashing rain, carrying a bulging black portmanteau and a big parrot cage wrapped in newspapers to protect the green bird inside.

He had taken up his quarters at Blaber's inn, and though the villagers had been a bit curious, as village folk are, they hadn't learned anything about the man during the months he had lived there. He was a free spender, seemed to have plenty of money, and being a genial soul, always ready to buy a pint for anyone ready to pass an hour with him, he was accepted at his face value and was generally liked.

He was a big man, well over six feet and weighing all of fifteen stone (two hundred and ten pounds); broad and thick, with a trick of standing with legs widespread and head cocked to one side—"Like a bloom'n' sailor," as Johnny Handy put it. His face was tanned, his nose sharp and crooked a bit to one side, and he wore a short crisp beard, that, like his thick, tousled hair, was flaming red, streaked a bit with gray.

Old Abner Spree claimed to be over one hundred years old and had been to sea as a young man. He said if it had been seventy-five years ago he'd have sworn Big Ben was a bloody pirate, and he got very reminiscent and spent the whole evening telling stories of days when he was at sea and the adventures he'd had. No one doubted that Big Ben had been a sailor, but no one asked him, for good-natured as he was and liked as he was by all, still there was that about him that made a body hesitate to pry into his affairs or ask personal questions.

And he was a man of very regular habits. Every morning he was up before sun-up, and carrying a heavy stick that was near to being a club, and dressed in Harris tweeds, he'd go for a long walk through the fields and spinneys. Many's the time I've met him as I was driving to Guildford or to Kingston, striding along as though he were walking on a wager, whistling or puffing furiously at his big black pipe. Or I'd see him sitting on a stile or a rock maybe, watching a flock of rooks or gazing up at a singing lark, or maybe as intent on studying some bug or tree as one of the scientific chaps from Kensington.

Regular as a clock, too, he'd be off to London, starting by the first motor-coach in the morning and getting back in the evening, and always with a black leather bag in his hand. What he did in London nobody knew, but we all thought likely 'twas to his bank he went, for "Blaber's Inn" had always had a good trade, betwixt the folks round about and the tourists forever passing back and forth on the Portsmouth Road, or stopping off to see the old houses and the church and what not at Street Hobham. And since Big Ben had owned the Inn, the business had picked up most amazingly. He had his beer and ale cold—that pleased the American tourists immensely—and there wasn't a pub 'twixt Portsmouth and London could old a candle to the Blue Lion for food. Moreover, Big Ben had fixed up the old place till 'twas like a museum to see, what with heads of foxes and red deer and stags, and stuffed pheasants and birds, and big pike and salmon on panels on the walls, and rusty old guns and swords and what not, together with ugly idols from Lord knows where, and curios from foreign parts.

A great hand he was for collecting this, that and the other, buying old junk in the way of chairs and tables and settees and old pewter and china. And there was his parrot in its cage, a fine green bird big as a pigeon, though whatsoever he wanted her for I don't know, for she never talked, but croaked and whistled a bit and screamed fit to deafen one. But the place was cozy, and Big Ben had the neatest bit of a barmaid that eyes could see—a pert, bright-eyed, laughing lass with hair as red as is own, but a right proper girl at that.

So, taken altogether, the place did a right roaring trade and the silver came in fast and Big Ben had every reason to go to London to bank his savings every week.

Still 'twas queer, as we often remarked, that whenever strangers were about and the tap-room and bar-parlour were crowded, Big Ben never was about. He'd be sitting alone or with a crony or two in the little back room with a mug of mull'd ale or maybe arf an' arf, and his big black pipe, and most often with his coat off and his shirt open showing his hairy chest with a bit of blue tattoo on it. He'd be as chummy as is, but never did I know him to tell a word of his past, or a tale of the sea, or of the foreign parts he must have been to. Now and again some one of us would try a bit to draw him out, mentioning this, that or the other thing quite casually, or maybe speaking of something we'd read in the press about some foreign place or even getting old man Spree to start in on his everlasting stories we'd heard a thousand times and more. But it wasn't any use. Big Ben'd nod his head, or maybe roar with laughter till the mugs rattled, and swear 'twas marvelous or past belief, but never a yes nor a no nor a when I was to this, that or the other place. I mind one day that Tom Dickey asked him about that parrot of his. Asked what Big Ben kept her for, as she didn't say so much as "Damn," and then asked where he got her.

"Them as talks less said the most sense," said Big Ben, cocking his ead one side and peering at te bird with eyes half shut. "And she's a wery remarkable Poll at that," he goes on. "In fact," he says, "the most remarkable parrot in the world, I might say. Of course ye can't see it," he says, "neither can a lad see anything so remarkable in another lad's sweetheart, though he'll think there be none like her on earth. 'Tis the same with her"—jerking his thumb towards the cage hanging

in the window. But he never answered Tom's question about where he got hold of the bird, I noticed.

BUT he must have told the truth about her being so remarkable, for one day a party from America was stopping in at the Blue Lion, and having their ale and bitters and what not, as they waited for luncheon, and one of them—a nervous, thin old fellow in knickers and with goggles, jumps up and goes over to the bird hanging in the sun. "My goodness!" he exclaims, for I was in the bar having a drink and a chat with Bess, and I heard him. "My goodness gracious!" he says a second time. "Where on earth did these people get hold of this bird! Why, as true as I live it's a toucrao. A most remarkable specimen and the only one I've ever seen in confinement."

One of the ladies laughed. "Why, Professor," she said, "it seems just a common green parrot to me. What's so remarkable about the creature?"

The old fellow snorted. "And those worm-eaten old chairs you raved over this morning looked just like any ordinary old chairs to me," he told her back. "What was so remarkable about them, I'd like to know?"

"Why, why, they were old—they were antiques, and very, very rare," she says.

"Exactly," snaps the one she'd called "Professor." "Well, this bird is *not* old and he is *not* antique, but he's very, very, and then again very, rare, if you want to know. In fact, it is quite the most remarkable bird I have ever seen and well worth my visit to England."

"Oh, do let's buy the precious thing, then," says another lady. "I'm having my boudoir all finished in just that delightful shade of green and the dear bird will be in perfect harmony."

But I expect Big Ben must have been listening also, or maybe the waitress or someone told him, for just then Jimmy the porter comes in and takes the bird, cage and all, and starts to go out. But the Professor stops him.

"Will you inquire of the owner of the bird if he will dispose of it, and for how much?" he says to Jimmy.

But Jimmy comes back and tells the Professor that the owner doesn't care to part with the parrot, at which the lady with the green boudoir laughs and says she has never yet found anything that money won't buy, and will five hundred pounds make the bird's owner change his mind. Jimmy's eyes fairly popped out of his head at that, and I came near to spilling my bitters and grabbed at Bess for support. I was that put out about hearing the lady offering five hundred quid for a green parrot that I didn't even talk. "Mind where you're putting your hand," snaps Bess, giving me a smart slap. "But my Gawd, she said that as easy as I'd say sixpence!"

And when Jimmy comes back and says as how the owner—meaning Big Ben, of course—wouldn't sell, not for five hundred nor for five thousand pounds, Bess grabbed me, and I didn't ask her to mind where her hands were nor slap her, you may be sure, and for the matter of that neither of us noticed; we were that amazed to think Big Ben put so much store by his parrot that couldn't say boo. Well, the upshot of it was that Big Ben's green parrot became right famous—what with everyone talking about his having refused five hundred pounds for the bird—and everyone would drop into the Blue Lion just to have a look at the bird, and

of course they'd have their drinks, and as I told Sam Ryder, and the others agreed, Big Ben wasn't such a fool as we'd thought to refuse the American lady's offer, because he was making more out of the bird being so famous than he'd have got from her—that is if the parrot didn't die on him.

But of course there was a bit of gossip going about, too. A man who could refuse five hundred quid—or five thousand, he said—as easy as is, must be rich, and even with all that he was making at the Blue Lion it began to get about that Big Ben had a tidy bit of gold. Of course it was nobody's business. He had as much right to money as the next, and for all anyone knew he might have got it in the gold fields somewhere, or by honest work or saving or any other way. But there's no place like a village for gossip, as you know, and folks began to recollect how he came to Hobham, how he paid for the inn with gold pieces and that they really didn't know anything about the man.

Now, I'd known him ever since he'd come and I hadn't noticed anything strange nor mysterious about him—except maybe his not wishing to be about among strangers, which wasn't mysterious, but just natural, seeing how he preferred going about without his coat and collar, and was never one to dress up. But others said his trips to London were suspicious, though Lord knows why, and that he might have been a robber or a bandit or a gambler or some sort of a scoundrel before he came to Hobham, and why didn't he have friends or ever get letters? And when the maid at the Blue Lion told Mrs. Gregg that she never in all the time Ben had been there had seen his big portmanteau open, but that it always was kept locked, and said he always kept a loaded pistol in his room, everyone began to say Big Ben had a past and kept some secret locked up in the portmanteau.

There were some of us laughed at this talk—I did, and Sam Ryder and two or three others who knew Big Ben pretty well—that is, as well as anyone in the village knew him. But old Andy Prout and doddering old man Spree shook their heads and said they wouldn't be a bit surprised if Big Ben had been a pirate or something worse.

It was about this time that a stranger came to Brenton's Heath and put up at the Old Bear there. I was over to the Heath the day he came and at first sight I gasped like a fish out of water, for back-to-as I saw him when he got off the bus, he was so like Big Ben I thought 'twas he himself, though I knew he was over to the Blue Lion at the same time. Yes, sir, the stranger was the same build as Big Ben—broad as an ox, tall, and he even had the red hair. But he was a younger man. I could see as he turned about, there was no gray in his hair and no beard. But the same sort of nose and tanned like he'd been long at sea or in some hot land, and with a big ugly white scar running across one cheek and making his mouth turn up at the right side as if he was ever grinning on one side of his mouth. He walked like a sailor, too; legs spread, but didn't cock his head aside like Big Ben. I don't know as I can quite make it clear, but somehow I got the idea that while Big Ben was a good-natured, easy-going, good-hearted chap, even if a bit rough in his ways, this fellow at the Old Bear was a nasty dispositioned, surly sort, and one as wouldn't stand for any humbugging or nonsense. Still, he spoke fair-enough as he tipped the porter for

carrying in his bag, a black portmanteau as like Big Ben's as two peas in a pod. Yes, aside from the beard, and he being a younger man, I'd have said he and Big Ben might have been twin brothers. But there was one thing; this man didn't bring a parrot with him.

Well, I had it in mind to mention him to Big Ben, when I got back to Hobham; thought he'd be interested in knowing there was a stranger so like him over at the Old Bear. But what with one thing and another I clean forgot it, and I didn't think of the stranger again till the next day, when Big Ben being off to London and I dropping in to have a mug of ale and a word with Bess, who should come into the Blue Lion but the stranger from over to the Old Bear. I didn't like the way he leered and winked at Bess, who was a right proper lass, as I've said, and not one to be free with, but he spoke civilly enough, and ordering a "gin and It" sat himself down on a settle and lit his pipe.

"Maybe," says he after a bit, "you may know if there's a party hereabouts by the name of Tom Henley."

I looked at Bess and Bess looked at me and we both shook our heads. "No," I told him. "Man and boy I've lived here or hereabouts all my life, and I know every man, woman and child in this corner of Surrey. But there's only two Henleys I know of. One's the widow Henley over to West Clacton, and her man was killed in the war and his name was John, not Tom; and the other's Bill Henley, the constable at Esher."

The fellow dropped the lid to his left eye and looked at me like I had two heads or maybe a tail or some'at of the sort. "Hm," says he. "And maybe the lad I'm asking about's not known as such hereabouts. Maybe he's hoisted false colors, so to say, and's a sailin' under another name. Maybe if I told you what sort he was you'd know of him: A big man he is, nigh the same size as me, with red hair and a bit gray and likely a whisker on his face, but no scar to twist his mug to one side like I carries. Maybe for a crown you can recall such a lad as bein' seen hereabouts."

NOW I can't say to this minute why I didn't tell the chap he was describing Big Ben to a T, and I don't know likewise why Bess kept a still tongue in her head. But the stranger had asked for Big Ben under another name, and if Big Ben wanted to be Ben Pollard instead of Tom Henley, it was likely he had reasons and 'twas no business of mine to be telling this stranger that the man he was asking for and Big Ben were one and the same.

And I expect Bess felt the same, because we felt Big Ben was a decent chap, no matter if he wasn't Big Ben Pollard at that, while this chap, sitting there and asking us questions, wasn't the kind of a lad we'd coddle to.

"So you don't know such a lad, then?" says the stranger, drinking the last of his "gin and It." "Well, that's damn queer," he goes on, half-talking to himself. "They told me over to the Old Bear as how I'd find the lad I'm lookin' for over to the Blue Lion here. Said he ran the place, they did. Now what's the game, me lass, and you, me lad, tryin' to stall me off by sayin' there's no such man in these parts? Who's the owner of this pub, I'm askin' you?"

I'm a quiet lad as a rule, but I've got my temper at times and the tone and the words of this fellow with the crooked mouth didn't suit me.

"Look you here," says I, a bit hotly, I expect. "Who

you are or what your business is, I don't know and I don't care a damn. You're a stranger here and you come prying into other folks' affairs and sitting there asking questions like you were in a bally police court and you the magistrate. If you want information, why the blazes don't you go to the police and ask them? And if you want to know who the owner of this pub is, come round this evening and ask Big Ben himself. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, laddy me lad."

The fellow grinned and stood up. "No offense intended," says he. "But how, may I ask you, did Big Ben, as you call him, buy this tidy bit of a place? With good gold, I'll warrant. And where do you suppose he got gold, me lad, with no gold knocking about o' England since the war? In some foreign port, o' course. And how do you know *how* he got it? Maybe by hook or by crook, maybe by honest work, and maybe by sheddin' a bit of some other lad's blood an' helpin' of himself to what he wanted. Have you thought o' that, me lass and me lad? Have ye thought that maybe Big Ben, as you call him, is a bloody murderer and wanted by the police? And maybe there's a tidy bit of a reward for him as you two might be dividin' for to start house-keepin' with, and maybe that's why he's Big Ben and not Tom Henley no more. So—"

But he got no further. Bess was a quick-tempered lass, and she turned as red as her hair, and, picking up an empty stout bottle, she shied it at the fellow's head. She was a good shot, Bess was, and the stranger ducked just in time. And not quite in time at that, for the bottle struck him fair and square in the shoulder. He spat out an oath and started for us, but just then the door opens and in comes Sam Phillips, the postman, and Billy Hart, and, with a glare and a mumbled curse, the fellow goes out.

"Who's the big lad?" asks Sam, as he and Billy come over to the bar. "He's as like Big Ben as is, savin' the scar on his face and lackin' the gray in his hair and the beard to his cheeks and chin. A stranger, I'm thinkin'!"

"Aye," says I, "and no welcome one at that, to my way of thinking. He's stopping over to the Old Bear at Brenton's Heath."

Well, we thought no more of the fellow at that, not till evening when Big Ben come home and Billy Hart, who was a gossiping sort, tells Big Ben as how the very spit of himself was into the Blue Lion this day.

I noticed Big Ben gave a start and his knuckles turned white where his hands rested on the table edge, but he spoke calm and steady enough.

"So," he says; "I'd like to see the lad as looks like me. What sort of a chap was he?"

Well, Billy goes on to describe him, and Big Ben turns to Bess. "What was he doin' here?" he asks her. "Did he say where he was stoppin'?"

She told him the lad was asking for a man named Tom Henley, and said he was stopping at the Old Bear at Brenton's Heath. I was watching Big Ben close, for in my ears were the stranger's words about murder and a reward, much as I tried to forget them, and I saw that Big Ben for all his calmness and his easy tones was mightily disturbed by the news. But he was not the one to give himself away, not he. "Hm," says he; "Tom Henley, eh? Never heard of him, I haven't, but then I've not been here over long. Do any of you lads know of the man?"

A cool customer he was, no less, and even if he was all that the other lad had hinted, I couldn't feel a dislike for Big Ben. And maybe, I thought, the other had said what he had just to draw Bess and me out, and there might be nothing to it. Like as not, I thought, 'twas a bit of blackmail he was trying, for he looked the sort of bouncer to be that dirty, and maybe he *did* know something of Big Ben's past that he could threaten to tell unless he was well paid to keep quiet. But what if Big Ben *did* have a bit of a shady past at that, I thought. Didn't we all have things we'd like to forget and have forgot? I'm no angel myself, I'm not, and anyhow, if Big Ben had done anything much 'twas the business of the police and of nobody else. And as for having gold to buy the Blue Lion with, well, I hadn't thought of that before, 'tis true, and I doubt if the others had, but you see we all knew he was a stranger, and coming up on the Portsmouth coach we'd taken it for granted he'd come over seas—what with his big coat and his bag and his parrot and all, and his sailorish ways—and so why shouldn't he have had good gold sovereigns? Maybe he'd come from America or maybe from some other spot where gold was plenty, and couldn't a man have a few hundred pounds of money in his pockets without being a murderer or a thief or a rascal of some sort? Howsoever, liking Big Ben as I did, and knowing him as well as the next, me being so much about and dropping in to the Blue Lion and chatting with Bess and what not, I decided 'twould do no harm to tell Big Ben a bit more of the other chap's words, so if there was anything to it all, Big Ben'd be on his guard. So I managed to get him one side and told him everything. He listened mightily intent and his face serious and then he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Thanks, Bob, thankee kindly," he says, clapping me on the back. "'Tis not many as would be as free-spoken as you, but I know 'tis because you think I should know, and I know you don't believe a blinkin' word of it. But I know the lad over to the Old Bear, I do, and I know his game and what he's after, and I can look after myself, I can. So don't worry over me, Bob, me lad, but thanks for what you've told me."

WELL, sir, that was that, and me not knowing any more than before, except that Big Ben knew the other and his game, and the matter wasn't any business of mine after that. But just the same when Nate Bronson said he'd seen a hulking big man muffled up in a cloak hanging about the Blue Lion after one in the morning—though what Nate was doing up at that hour the Lord alone knows (poaching, I expect)—I began to feel that there *was* something afoot and that the stranger from the Old Bear wasn't there for any good and peaceful reasons. In fact I had a mind to tell Big Ben about the fellow sneaking about in the middle of the night, but remembered he'd said he could take care of himself, so I didn't mention it. In fact Bess said I'd best not, and she said, too, that 'twas a kind of funny thing that ever since the other man had been there, Big Ben had kept his parrot in his bedroom, instead of in the bar-parlour.

"Maybe," I said, "it hasn't anything to do with the fellow, or again perhaps he's a rascal and a thief and Big Ben thinks he may try to steal the bird. If it's worth five hundred quid, as the American seemed to think, it's well worth lifting."

"And another thing," says Bess. "Carrie" (that was the maid at the inn) "tells me he keeps his pistols all loaded and under his pillow now," says Bess.

"So I'd do the same," says I, "if that scar-faced scoundrel had been asking about me and hinting at a past I didn't want dug up and——"

"Then he *does* know him and he's really and truly Tom Henley!" exclaimed Bess. "Golly, I wonder what he's done that there's a reward for him."

Well, of course I'd made a slip, but by now Bess and I understood each other pretty well, and I told her the whole thing and warned her to keep it to herself. "But I don't believe a thing about that reward," I said. "If the lad over to the Heath knows anything about Big Ben's past, he's just a rat of a blackmailer. Do you think he wouldn't want to grab that reward if there was one? And I shouldn't be a bit surprised if *he's* the one the police want, not Big Ben."

"Well, the next morning I was off early for Kingston, and as I drove along past Fairmile, who should I see walking along the road ahead of me but Big Ben and the stranger from the Heath. You could have knocked me over with a feather, for they looked as friendly as is, talking earnest but no high words nor excitement, and now and then laughing. I was that dumfounded I stopped the car and sat there, just looking at them, until they turned into the lane and disappeared.

But that night, as I was coming back late, it was a different story. I was pretty near to Hobham, coming in by way of Oxshott, and was passing the bit of spinney by Ockam Dean, when I heard loud voices and a curse or two from behind the hedge. Of course I didn't stop—it wasn't any of my affair and it don't pay to interfere in other folks' quarrels—but I could have sworn before any judge and jury that the voices, or one of them, was that of Big Ben and the other that of the lad with the scar on his face. And sure enough, when I dropped into the Blue Lion, Bess told me Big Ben was out, and hadn't been in since he'd gone off with his stick along about dark. Well, I hung around a bit, worried for fear there might have been trouble, for you see I'd never heard Big Ben angry or cursing before, and I knew he had that whacking heavy stick, and when a big quiet man gets mad, he gets mad all through and goes crazy like and sees red and doesn't stop to think what he is doing. And I knew if he hit out with that stick, he'd just about bash in the head of the other chap. Not that I'd have minded if he had, only I knew the police would get him if he did and there'd be the devil to pay all around, what with none of us really knowing anything about Big Ben, and the gossip there'd been about him and one thing and another. But I needn't have worried. Along about ten Big Ben came in, looking a bit flustered and red in the face and twirling his stick, but otherwise the same as usual. He drank a lot that night, he did, that is for him, who usually was a most moderate drinker, and he smoked steady and wasn't so talkative as usual. And around ten-thirty sharp he got up and shoosed us all out, saying as how he was tired and was going to bed and didn't want to be disturbed and was going to close up for the night.

That was the last any of us ever saw of Big Ben alive.

First thing next morning Carrie came screaming out of the Blue Lion—she was the first one to be up, bar-

ring Big Ben—and yelling that Big Ben was dead. Of course everyone in the village—leastwise all who were up and dressed and a lot who weren't, that is weren't dressed, I mean, came on the run after Constable Haley. Bess was standing in the bar-parlour, wrapped up in some sort of a silk thing and all a-tremble and scared, but looking mighty pretty, I thought, and Jimmy the boots was shaking and scared like the others. Well, Carrie, between gasps and starts, told how she'd gone to Big Ben's room to take him his tea, and had knocked on the door, and no answer coming had peeped in, and there was Big Ben sprawled on the floor with his head all twisted to one side and dead as you please.

"Murder it is, sir!" wailed Carrie, who was old and excitable anyhow. "Oh, Lord, ha' mercy on me; but I can see his eyes now, sir. All glazed and glassy like, an' rolled up and his face as purple as a pansy, sir. Lord ha' mercy! The poor master murdered in his own pub! And such a fine, generous, good-hearted gentleman he was at that, sir! And now——"

BUT nobody paid any heed to her, for everyone was pressing after Constable Haley except me. I was trying to calm Bess, and telling her to hurry back to her room and get properly dressed, for the coroner'd be along in a jiffy and he and the police would be asking questions of all the staff, and she couldn't be sitting about before a lot of strangers with only a kimono on and her hair down and no shoes or stockings on. Well, having got her off, I followed along to have a look at Big Ben myself. Constable Haley'd covered his face with a sheet, but he lay there on the floor—nobody moving him till the coroner came, of course, and then I noticed that the cage of the parrot was empty and that the bird was dead, too, lying in a mess over by the window. I pointed this out to the constable—the rest of the crowd having gone back to talk it all over at the bar, and he nodded and said as how he knew, but the law said no *corpus delicti* could be moved until the coroner gave permission, and as how it didn't say whether only a human body was a *corpus delicti* or any body was, and as both Big Ben and the bird had been murdered, he wasn't taking any chance of being called off by the coroner, and was leaving both *corpus delicti* where he found them.

Well, sir, after a bit the coroner—who'd been called on the telephone from Kingston—came in. He was a short man with a red face and a paunch like a publican, a man named Chermondy, a Welshman I think, or maybe a Cornishman, but a jolly old boy, bald as an apple and with keen blue eyes and a funny trick of saying, "Well, well; 'pon my honor!" at everything.

So as he comes into the Blue Lion he was puffing and blowing, and the first thing he says is, "Well, well! 'Pon my honor! The man's dead. Look's like homicide, 'pon my honor, it does!"

Well, he examined Big Ben carefully and kept muttering to himself. "Choked, strangled," he says. "'Pon my honor, yes. Garrotted with a thong. Well, well!" Then he told Constable Haley to get the body on the bed and to summon all the staff of the Inn and any outsiders that had any information to gather in the bar-parlour so he could question them.

"Ow about yon bird, your honor?" asks the constable, jerking his head toward the dead parrot. "The bird's been murdered, too, I'm thinkin', your worship."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the coroner. "How *can* a bird be murdered, Constable? Answer me that, sir. Murder, as you should know is, in legal parlance, homicide. Homicide is derived from the Latin *homo*, or man. Homicide means man-killing, and how could the death of a bird be homicide, or as you put it, murder? Well, well! 'Pon my word, it's amusing! A murdered parrot! 'Pon my word, that's good. Do with the thing? Why do what you please—throw it out, stuff it, eat it for all I care! 'Pon my word, yes!"

Constable Haley was red and flustered. "Did you 'ear 'im?" he exclaimed, after the coroner had waddled away. "Did you 'ear 'im sye as 'ow Hi could heat the bloomin' bird? Heat a parrot, my heye! Hand just because Hi done me duty an' never laid 'and to the *corpus delicti*! 'E's a bloomin', blinkin' blounder, 'c is!"

"If you don't mind, Haley," says I, "I'll take charge of the bird. I'm not going to eat it any more than you, but the coroner said you might stuff it, and being as I was a close friend of Big Ben here, and knowing what store he set by the bird, I'd like to have it as a remembrance of him. I'll take it over to Guildford to the taxidermist there and have it stuffed proper, and put it in a cage so it'll look as life-like as is."

"Tyke hit an' welcome," says he. "'Honly never let me put my heyes hon the blinkin' thing again."

We all went into the bar-parlour, where the coroner sat with a note-book and pencil, and there, before we could get seated or begin, came the sergeant of police from Esher and the other two constables from Street Hobham and Church Hobham. Looked quite a bit like a real police-court it did, and very solemn. Of course we'd all come to the same mind by now, that is, I had, and Nate and Billy Hart and Sam Phillips and Bess and all of us who knew about the stranger over to the Old Bear. We are all as cocksure that he was the one that had killed Big Ben as we wanted to be. Who else would have done it, and why? And who else had quarreled with him? And why else had Big Ben kept his pistol under his pillow? That gave me a new idea, and I wondered why he hadn't shot whoever'd come into his room and where the pistol was. So I stepped over to Constable Haley and whispered to him about it, and he went back to Big Ben's room, and pretty soon he came back carrying the pistol and with a queer look on his face. He laid it down before the sergeant, instead of the coroner, and saluted.

"Hi found this hunder the deceased man's pillow, sir," he said. "'But has you'll see for yourself, sir, hit's not loaded, sir."

"Well, well! 'Pon my word, what's this?" exclaimed the coroner. "A pistol, eh, and not loaded. Well, well! I must make a note of that."

Then he began questioning the lot of us. First, Carrie the maid, and a hard time he had of it with her, what with her wringing her hands and crying and getting excited and having to say over and over again how she'd taken up Big Ben's tea and found him dead and all. But with it all never a word that helped, as far as I could see. Then Bess, and Jimmy the porter, and myself, but no nearer to getting at the bottom of the matter; but then why should he, when we all knew, as well as we wanted to, that the stranger with the scar had done for Big Ben. 'Twas funny, I thought, that a constable hadn't been sent to arrest him, for even the coroner must have seen by now who the murderer was,

what with my story and that of Bess and of Nate and everyone, all telling of the fellow's coming over and what he'd said of Big Ben, and how I'd met them quarreling on the roadside and all.

THEN I noticed the sergeant get up and slip out of the door, very quiet like, and I thought to myself he was going after the stranger. But in that I was wrong, for pretty soon he comes back, and the coroner then being writing and the place quiet, he goes over and speaks to him and tells him he's been having a look at Big Ben's room. He glares at poor Constable Haley like as if he'd been a boy caught stealing apples.

"A fine credit to the police you are," he says. "Were you frightened at the corpse?" he asks, sarcastic, "or did you think a murder was a bally political meeting that you never so much as looked about for clues? No, you didn't even find those bloody fingermarks on the window-ledge and door, nor the deceased's portmanteau and bag slit open and rifled. A fine constable you are, to be sure!"

"Well, well! 'Pon my honor!" exclaimed the coroner. "What's this, sergeant? Fingermarks and bloody, you say! And the bags cut open! Important, very important. I must make a note of that. But—but, my dear sergeant, why should there be bloody fingermarks? The deceased came to his death by strangulation—there was no wound, no blood. I made a most careful examination."

"As to that I can't say, sir," replied the sergeant. "Maybe the murderer cut himself, or"—a bright idea came to him—"maybe the parrot nipped his finger, sir. No doubt he wrung the bird's neck to stop his squalling, and parrots have a nasty way of nipping, you know, sir. At all events he left bloody fingerprints, and I'd suggest, sir, we have a man from Scotland Yard down to take a look at them, sir."

"Well, well. 'Pon my word, yes, sergeant," agreed the coroner. "And no doubt, as you say, the parrot nipped the rascal's finger. Let's have a look at the bird and see if there's blood on its beak."

"Well, it was there; blood, I mean, but not on its beak so much as on its feathers about the neck; red stains on the green feathers as plain as is.

Of course that settled it. But why, I thought—and I whispered as much to Bess—didn't they send and get the scar-faced fellow before he cleared out?

But I didn't have time to say much, for now the coroner was standing up most solemn and imposing, like a judge in court—though more like a publican about to make a speech on a bank holiday—and clearing his throat and staring about at us over his spectacles.

"Hm," says he. "I find that the deceased, Benjamin Pollard, otherwise known as 'Big Ben,' came to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown, but that suspicion points strongly, most strongly, towards a gentleman who is or was residing at the Old Bear Inn at Brenton's Heath, and while it is not within my province or jurisdiction to do so, I suggest—in fact I advise—that the said gentleman be apprehended and placed under arrest, and that an expert be secured from Scotland Yard to aid the local police in their investigation of the lamentable tragedy that has occurred here in the Blue Lion Inn. I—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," says the sergeant, interrupting him. "But the bird—er, the suspected gentle-

man—has flown, sir. The constable I dispatched to Brenton's Heath reports that the gentleman who was known by the name of Lemuel Henley has been absent from the Old Bear since yesterday at nine o'clock of the morning, sir, at which time, sir, he was seen to step aboard a London motor-coach, sir."

"Well, well! 'Pon my honor!" exclaims the coroner. "This is very serious. But it merely signifies delay. He will soon be apprehended. Have you notified London that he is wanted, sergeant?"

The sergeant nodded. "Yes, sir," he says, "but—"

At this minute there are hurrying footsteps outside and the door opens and who comes rushing in but the stranger himself! Yes, sir; running straight into the lion's jaws, as you might say, and a mighty queer thing for a murderer to do, I thought, knowing, as he must have, that the police were at the Blue Lion and that he'd be the first one to be suspected of doing for Big Ben.

"My God!" he exclaims, before anyone could speak. "Is it true? Is it true that Tom—Ben—has been murdered? I saw it in the *News*, but I couldn't believe it, though often I've warned him. I—"

The sergeant was on his feet looking very stern and officious and all. "It is perfectly true," he says, "and you may consider yourself under arrest on the charge of the murder of one Benjamin Pollard, owner of the Blue Lion Inn," says he. "Constable Haley, take charge of the prisoner."

For a minute the fellow with the scar stands there, struck dumb as you might say, gaping about at us all as if not believing his ears. Then he turns redder than ever and his eyes blaze and he takes a step towards the sergeant, his head stuck forward and his big fists clenched, and for a moment I thought he was about to attack him.

"You consummate, addle-pated ass!" he spits out. "Me, me, the murderer! Why, you blithering idiot, do you think I'd murder my own brother?"

Well, at that we all came near fainting with the surprise. The brother of Big Ben! But we might have known it, what with him being so like Ben and all. And hadn't he asked if a Tom Henley was here? And hadn't he been registered over to the Old Bear as Lemuel Henley? 'Twas plain as the nose on your face now. But after all, that didn't prove he hadn't killed Big Ben. Many a brother's been killed by a brother, and with my own ears and eyes I'd heard and seen the two quarreling. And this Lemuel fellow'd hinted at dark things about Big Ben, that time he'd dropped into the Blue Lion.

The sergeant must have thought as much, for as soon as he'd got over his surprise at the fellow's words he says: "His brother you may be and then again you may not be, but, brother or not, you're under arrest, sir."

For a minute I thought the man would knock the sergeant down, so ugly and vicious he looked, but he saw that the sergeant was in earnest and that 'twas a serious matter, and suddenly he threw back his big head and laughed.

"I suppose it's your duty, sergeant," he says. "But it's an ill welcome for me who came here post-haste at word of my brother's death to be nailed for killing him, when since yesterday noon I've been in London to an hour ago." Then, in another tone: "May I see the—my brother's body?" he asks. The sergeant turned to

the coroner, a questioning look on his face, but the coroner nodded. "Well, well! 'Pon my honor, of course; why not?" says he; then:

"But watch your prisoner carefully, sergeant. He appears to be a desperate character."

Well, sir, there's no earthly use going over all that took place for a time after that. Big Ben was buried, and a fine funeral he had, too, with flowers and a silver-trimmed coffin and plumes on the hearse and all, and everyone in the village out to follow to the grave. Yes, and even the man accused of murdering him was allowed to attend the services, though guarded by two constables at that. And I must say he looked as sad and sorrowful as any.

THE chap from Scotland Yard came down to Hobham, too, a slim young chap, looking more like one of the swells from the West End than a policeman, but a nice-spoken chap, although having a bit too much to say to Bess to suit me, though she turned up her nose at him, I must say. He fussed around a bit—mostly in Ben's room, that had been kept under lock and seal since the murder, the Blue Lion being closed down, with Carrie out of a job and Bess at the White Hart and Jimmy, the boots, gone to London or somewhere. Yes, everything set at topsy-turvy over Big Ben's death, and his fine pub idle, for you see he hadn't left a will, or at least no will had been found, and the place would have to be sold up, only the prisoner, claiming to be Big Ben's brother and next of kin, if he proved he was, the Blue Lion would go to him, though what use 't would be, if he was found guilty and was hanged, I couldn't see.

But as I was saying, the lad from Scotland Yard came down and went back again and what he found or didn't find I don't know. Neither do I know all that went on at the hearing of the case of the man with the scar, Henley.

Bess and Carrie and I and the others all had to appear again, though we only told the same stories again as we'd told the coroner, and a great waste of time I thought it. But some of the case I heard and more I read in the *News* and more I was told by Constable Haley and others and most of all by young Roger Keats, the barrister. Well, sir, the chap from Scotland Yard testified as how the blood stains on the window ledge and the door weren't blood at all, nor were the red stains on the bird that I'd had right properly stuffed by the taxidermist at Guildford and that was brought in—the bird, I mean—as evidence, and which everyone said was as lifelike and natural as is, and you'd almost expect to hear him croak or squawk. And moreover, the police admitted that the fingermarks on the window ledge weren't those of the prisoner, and a doctor who'd been called in swore as to how there wasn't as much as a prick or a scratch on his fingers or body anywhere. So there they were with that evidence gone west, as you might say. And he—the prisoner, I mean—had letters posted in Hobham and dated from the Blue Lion Inn, and others from elsewhere, in Big Ben's writing, calling the man "Dear Brother Lem" and signed Tom. And finally the fellow had half a dozen or more witnesses who all swore to it that this man, Lemuel Henley, was in London all the day and the night when Big Ben had been murdered, and didn't leave till the morning when he heard of the matter. So they couldn't find a

true bill and discharged him. Then he did a queer thing—and what I thought was a fine, brave thing for any man to do. And he wasn't called upon to do it at that, as you'll see, and it might have got him into a bad fix and into gaol at that. He stood up in the court and he thanks the gentlemen for their fairness and their verdict. Then he says he intends to find the murderer of his brother, come what may, and he goes on to ask why no one has taken the trouble to find out what it was that his brother had kept locked in his bags, and why Big Ben had gone so often to London. What, he asks, was the motive for the murder? Robbery, of course, he says. Who but himself could have known what was in the bags? he asks. And why? he asks the court, did his brother go under the name of Benjamin Pollard when his real name was Tom Henley?

Well, sir, this *does* make a stir. You see, they'd been busy trying to find a true bill against *him*, and they'd not thought of others. They were that sure he was the right man; and now he'd sprung his letters and his alibi and all. So they were all at sea, as I might say, and didn't know which way to turn, so all they could do was to ask the man they'd accused of murder to tell them what he knew about Big Ben's bags and one thing and another. And though he had no cause to do so—and so Roger Keats, who knows the law from A to Zed, says—the law couldn't have forced him to say anything that might incriminate himself, he tells everything. And a fine, amazing story that would do for a six-penny thriller it was at that.

The two brothers had been sailors, Big Ben having been master and Lemuel mate, and trading in foreign parts, mostly on the coast of Africa. Then one day they get some diamonds from a native, and thinking maybe there was a new field thereabouts, they went into the country, and in Basutoland they find the stones as thick as thorns on a gorse bush. But before they got off, the government claps the lid on the pot, as you might say, making it law that no one can get diamonds in there, and neither can they take them out.

So there they were in a nice pickle, to be sure, the two brothers without a farthing to their names, their ship on the coast waiting, and their wallets full of stones that they'd spent every penny and all their time getting, and the law saying they weren't theirs and liable to be arrested and clapped into gaol if they were found out. Well, sir, they were good British citizens and honest seamen and respected the law, but that was too much. So they made up their mind to separate and so have a better chance, and to head for the coast, each from another direction.

But Lemuel didn't make it. The constabulary got him; he had the stones, and though he'd got them all before the new law was put on into the gaol he went. But the worst of it was he didn't know whether Brother Tom had got clear or not. Not until he got free from gaol, he didn't, and then he learned the ship had sailed away and Tom on it and left him with never a word or a shilling, he hadn't. You couldn't blame him overmuch if he thought bad of his brother at that. And when he'd worked his way to England, and found Tom had left the ship at Portsmouth, and traced him up to Hobham, where he was going by the name of Ben Pollard, and had bought the Blue Lion and all, why, who could blame him if he thought his brother had tried to give him the slip and do him?

LIKE as not I or anyone else would have felt the same. But when he met Big Ben and had a chat, though heated a bit the words were, he admitted, and Ben told him as how he'd been afraid he'd be nabbed and hadn't dared write, and that Lemuel's half of what he had was safe and waiting, why then they got friendly as ever again. And it was diamonds that Big Ben kept in his black bag, and to sell the stones, a few at a time, that he'd been going so frequent to London for. So, whoever'd killed Ben must have known of what he had, said Lemuel, and it wouldn't be hard to find out who sold stones that hadn't paid duty at that, providing the murderer sold them in England, and that didn't seem likely to me. Well, as I said, Lemuel might have got himself into trouble by his story, but he didn't, for he'd served his bit for getting the diamonds in Africa; he'd brought none in, and though Big Ben could have been jugged for smuggling in the stones, yet being as he was beyond reach of the law, why there wasn't much that could be done, only to order the strong box that Big Ben had rented in London to be opened and any stones that were in it confiscated by the Crown.

Well, sir, that was done, but never a diamond could be found. Only a lot of letters and papers and bank-books and such, and ten thousand pounds in notes. And among the papers Big Ben's will, which was the most amazing thing of all, when I heard of it. All the cash on hand and personal property of Big Ben was left to his brother, Lemuel, and then it went on to say that he willed the Blue Lion Inn with its furnishings, fixtures, stock-in-trade, good will and interests to Bess and me, provided we were proper married.

Well, you could have bowled me and Bess over with a feather, as you might say. All we'd been waiting for was to lay by a tidy bit for a rainy day, and here we were with a fine pub and all. So we were married the next day and that's how I come to own the Blue Lion, and a right neat living it's brought us these many years. But with ever and all, and Lemuel well fixed for life—and a right decent chap we found him after all our misjudging him, ay, none better—nobody was any nearer to finding who'd done for poor Big Ben, and only Lemuel and Bess and myself much interested in getting at the bottom of the mystery at that.

Then one day, as we were tidying up and getting the Blue Lion into shape for business—Bess and I having got back from a honeymoon down to Folkstone—who should pop in on us but the American professor chap who'd been so excited over the green parrot the year before. Yes, sir, there he was again, goggles and plus-fours and all.

"Ha!" says he, beaming all over. "Still here, I see. And here I am, back again." All the time his eyes were glancing this way and that, as if looking for something. "Gracious, yes!" he says. "Here I am again, but I don't see that most remarkable bird. Do you know," he goes on, "I've come all the way from America to this place solely for the purpose of seeing that bird, and if possible endeavoring to induce its owner to part with it? I'm prepared to pay anything in reason if—"

"Then I'm afraid you've had your trouble for nothing, sir," I tells him. "The owner's dead, sir, murdered he was in this very inn, and the bird as well—"

"Goodness gracious!" he exclaims. "What a dire calamity! What a tragedy! But I hope that the body was preserved and not cast away," he says, meaning, I

took it, the body of the green parrot and not Big Ben's.

I nodded. "Yes, sir," I tells him. "I saw that, sir. Big Ben always took great store by the bird, and I had him properly stuffed, by the taxidermist at Guildford, sir, and a fine job he made of it at that. But why Big Ben thought so much of it or why you're so anxious about it is more than I can see, for to me it's no better than any other green parrot, and it's only for memory of Ben that I paid for having it stuffed as I did, sir."

"Parrot!" he cried, jumping up and throwing out his hands like he was swimming. "Parrot! Oh my sacred aunt! Parrot indeed! Why, goodness gracious, the bird was not a parrot. It was a species of touraco—a rare, an exceedingly rare bird of African origin. And a most remarkable bird. Perhaps in some ways the most remarkable bird, for it's the only bird in the world whose feathers are actually green but actually contain red pigment. And this was a unique specimen, a specimen in captivity. However," he sighed, "better half a loaf than no bread. Would you care to—er—dispose of the specimen?"

"Hnm," says I, as Bess kicks my shins and nods and winks at me. "So it wasn't a parrot after all. And most likely Big Ben knew what he was talking of when he'd say 'twas a remarkable bird, perhaps the most remarkable bird. But as to selling it, well, I don't know as to that, sir. Bess and I set a lot of store by it, seeing as how Ben thought so much of the bird and as how he left us this pub and all. But then—"

"Of course, of course!" he interrupts me. "But consider that you are really doing a great deal for science if you dispose of the specimen to me. Here in this inn it will become dusty, moth-eaten and will be eventually thrown in the rubbish, while in a great museum, with your—er—name upon it, it will be preserved indefinitely and of benefit to the public. I am—"

"I'm not a rich man, sir," I told him, without waiting for him to finish, "but I have a good income and somehow I don't like the idea of selling the bird, as Big Ben wouldn't listen to selling it when he was alive. But if the bird's to go to a museum, then take it and welcome, I say, for nothing could suit Big Ben better than that, I am sure, sir."

Well, I never before heard and I never expect again to hear such thanks as the Professor—Judson his name was—gave Bess and me for that stuffed green bird of Big Ben's. And what with one thing and another, and him asking many a question, I told him the whole story of the murder and of the trial of Lemuel and all. He was right interested in it all, and a sharper chap I never met, no, not even Roger Keats, with what the things he picked to seize on and ask about and all.

"Blood! Of course it was not blood," he declared, when I told him about the fingerprints. "But it might as well have been. And whoever left those marks was the murderer, of course. And the pistol, not loaded! Did nobody ever ask about that?" says he.

"Not that I know of," I tells him. "It hadn't been fired and Big Ben hadn't been shot, so it didn't seem to have much to do with the matter."

Professor Judson snorted fit to give one a start. "Fools!" he most yells. "Fools, like the police everywhere. Why, goodness gracious, man alive, that unloaded pistol has everything to do with it. Where does this Mr. Lemuel Henley live? And where is this law-

yer—no, barrister I believe they are called over here—friend of yours have his office? Get them both and we'll have a talk and I'll wager we find the murderer soon.

WELL, it didn't take long to get Lemuel and Roger Keats to the Blue Lion when they heard about what Professor Judson had said. And all of us went into the back room—the same as Big Ben used to use for himself and his cronies when many folks were about in the bar-parlour—and there we sat listening to what the Professor from America had to say.

In the first place, he pointed out, the unloaded pistol proved the murderer was someone who had access to the inn and Big Ben's room. "Do you suppose for one minute," he asks, "that Big Ben, as you call him, would have bothered placing an empty gun under his pillow? Of course not! And didn't the maid report that he always kept a loaded gun there? Hence," he continues, "we must assume that he feared robbers or perhaps enemies might attack him or attempt to rob him, and that on the night in question he believed that he had a loaded weapon within reach. In other words, sirs, the person who plotted to rob, and if necessary murder him, knew that a loaded gun was always under the pillow, and to avoid all chances of being shot or of having the neighborhood aroused by the sound of a shot, he removed the cartridges from the pistol and replaced it empty and harmless. That much, gentlemen, we may assume is as well established as though proven in a court of law. But who was the person?"

"No doubt, had the weapon been carefully examined for fingerprints when first found, the identity of the murderer could have been established, for beyond any doubt in my mind it was some employee of the inn or some one who was stopping here that night——"

"There were no guests that night," I told him. "And as for the murderer being one of the staff, that's unthinkable, Professor," I says, a bit hotly.

"Tut, tut," he says, smiling at me condescendingly sort of. "I'm accusing no one, but I am attempting to solve this murder mystery by the means of deduction. Now we have deduced that the murderer extracted the charges from the pistol. Hence we may deduce it was someone who had access to the room and was familiar with the habits of his victim. I——"

"I don't agree with you," says Lemuel. "I admit I expect you're right about the reason for the pistol being unloaded, but I don't see any reason why a body shouldn't have come in from outside and have done it. He didn't have to know my brother's habits at that. He might have been looking about and found the pistol by chance. He——"

"True, quite true!" interrupted the professor. "In fact we have excellent evidence of the fact that the murderer *did* enter or leave by way of the window, but he would hardly have been able to enter unseen during the day, and if he had entered and had remained in the room, the bird would, in all probability, have squawked and betrayed his presence, for I understand that the creature invariably exhibited dislike of strangers by uttering its customary raucous notes. That, gentlemen, is one reason I unhesitatingly declare that the murderer was someone well known to the bird."

"You're forgetting the bird was killed," says Roger Keats. "No doubt he killed it to prevent it from giving warning of his presence."

The Professor snorted again. "And you are forgetting that the bird was killed *after* the murder was committed," he said. "Do you imagine that the owner, who prized the bird so highly as to refuse an offer of five hundred pounds for it, would not have noticed that his pet was killed——"

"Might have been killed while he was asleep," suggested Roger.

Professor Judson smiled. "But you told me he was fully dressed," he reminded us. "Though," he added, "I do not deny he may have been sleeping. But even so, it is inconceivable that the bird should have been dragged from its cage and strangled without uttering a cry, and what is more, I am prepared to prove, by irrefutable scientific facts and evidence, that the murder was committed before the bird was killed."

"Even if such proof is possible and admissible, I cannot see that it brings us any nearer to the solution of the mystery," said Roger Keats. "Whether the bird was killed first or whether the murder was committed first has no direct bearing on the case."

"Indeed?" says the professor. "In that you are greatly mistaken, Mr. Keats. It has a very great bearing on the solution, in my opinion. It establishes the fact, almost beyond question, that the murderer was recognized by the bird, and what is more, I am prepared to prove in any court that the murderer committed his crime, and finding it impossible to open the bags in search of the diamonds, left the room and returned, and not until then killed the bird for fear it might give an alarm while he was rifling the murdered man's possessions."

"If you could do that," said Lemuel, "then you're no Professor; you're a wizard. I've seen many a trick of magic by those fakirs out East, but not one of 'em could turn the trick you say you can do."

"Not a bit of magic about it," declared the professor. "But let me ask a question. Was it not raining that night?"

I STOPPED to think for a moment. "Yes," I said. "It was a clear evening, but it must have rained during the night, for everything was sopping wet next morning. I mind that when I ran after Carrie to the inn here, the street was all puddles."

Professor Judson grinned. "I knew it," he declared, "and if we can determine the time at which rain fell, we can determine the time when the murder was committed, or rather the time when the murderer left the room and later returned to it. But the most important matter is to learn the identity of the murderer, and the fingermarks he left upon the window-ledge are, I should say, our best clue to that."

"We can't take fingerprints of every blessed person in England," says Lemuel, "and what's more, whoever 'twas is most likely out of England long ago."

"Goodness gracious, of course not!" says the professor, "but the chances are ten to one the man who committed this crime is no novice and has committed others. No doubt Scotland Yard could find his fingerprints in their files. I'm surprised, amazed, that they have not already done so."

"I'm not," says Roger Keats. "Soon as it was proved the prints were not made with blood and didn't belong to friend Lemuel here, they didn't have any bearing on the case."

"My, my, my!" exclaimed the professor. "I should have thought they did; indeed I should. But of course, not realizing what the red marks were, they would not have regarded them as important as I do. But you see, Mr. Keats, even if the red marks were *not* blood, they amounted to the same thing, for only the man who killed the bird could have left them and only the man who murdered Mr. Henley could have or would have killed the bird. In fact, gentlemen, this bird is most remarkable in more ways than one, and in this case it will be found that the bird proved a most excellent, and I might say, providential witness—an actual detective, I might say."

"It's all Greek to me," grunted Lemuel. "You're telling us a lot of things without telling us anything. And what the bally old bird has to do with it is beyond me."

"All in good time, all in good time," smiled the professor. "I dearly love a little mystery, so do let me enjoy it. And I suggest now that we secure a snapshot of the fingerprints and make a visit to Scotland Yard and endeavor to identify them."

Well, that's just what we did, me going along, too, and leaving Bess that full of curiosity as to what 'twas all about she was fair on needles and pins.

So we went up to London and Scotland Yard and everyone seemed to know Professor Judson, even if he was an American, and we found the chap who'd been down to the Blue Lion and who'd taken the fingerprints and all. But he wasn't much interested, and when he told the professor that he'd gone over every fingerprint on file and not one of them was the same as those from Ben's room, even the professor seemed a bit knocked about. But he was a tenacious chap, was the professor, and once he set himself to an idea he stuck to it like all scientific chaps do, they tell me, and nothing would do him but he must have a look himself. While the young chap was getting out the files, we were looking about, there being a lot of bills with pictures of men wanted and fingerprints and such stuck around, and pretty soon I heard the professor say "Goodness gracious!" and I turned about and there he was staring at a paper on the desk as if he'd found another of the green birds there.

"Goodness gracious!" he exclaims a second time. "Whose are these fingerprints?" he asks the young chap, pointing at the paper. The young fellow looked at them casually. "Oh," says he, "those have just come in. They're from a bird they hooked over in Notting Hill. He was with another in a stolen motor car, but swore he had nothing to do with it, so the police sent over the prints to see if we had him on record here. But we haven't. I expect they'll turn him loose if they haven't done so already. But why do you ask?"

"Because," snaps the professor, "that man is the murderer of the erstwhile owner of the Blue Lion!"

"What!" jerks out the young chap, jumping up like he had sat on a tack. Then he grabs the prints taken from Ben's room, puts them beside the others and squints at them through a reading-glass.

"By gad, you're right!" says he, seizing the telephone. "Now, who the devil is the fellow? Good Lord, I hope they've still got him."

Then, after a few words and orders over the telephone: "He's safe," he says, hanging the instrument up. "What do you say if we go have a look at him?" So off we went to Notting Hill and into the gaol and down to a cell with a man sitting inside. He turns around as we look in and I see his face.

"My God, Jimmy!" says I.
And so 'twas. Jimmy the boots!

WELL, to make a long story short, of course he was up for a hearing and of course he swore he'd nothing to do with it. He even accounted for his fingerprints, saying as how, being in and out of the room often, he'd messed some red on his fingers the day afore the murder and had meant to clean up where he left the marks but was that upset by Ben's death and all that he clear forgot it. His barrister demanded he be set free, saying as how there was no evidence against him and only the flimsy charges of an alien and a scientist with an imagination who'd imagined himself an amateur Sherlock Holmes. But he didn't know Professor Judson; not him, he didn't.

So when Roger Keats got up, all primed with questions written down by the professor, he turns to Jimmy and says he, "Will you be good enough to state why you left the room after the murder was committed and before the bird was killed?"

I could see Jimmy turn pale at that, but he swore he'd never been in the room.

"And why was it necessary to destroy the bird, by wringing its neck?" asked Roger Keats.

Jimmy twisted a bit, but he swore he knew nothing of the matter.

"But," persisted the barrister, "you must have noticed that it had begun to rain while you went for the knife. You got quite wet, did you not? And who did you hear or think you heard that prevented you from leaving by the door rather than go out a second time in the rain? You must have heard something that caused you to go out by the window after all."

Well, with that Jimmy collapsed. He was a ratty sort anyhow, a sly little cockney, but no backbone to him, and he knew Roger Keats had him cornered.

He confessed everything and was tried and convicted, but he was never hanged. He died in prison, being as much scared to death as anything, I expect, and he vowed to the last he'd never got a stone or as much as a gold sovereign for murdering poor Big Ben.

But what puzzled me and Lemuel and Roger Keats and the rest was how the professor knew about Jimmy leaving the room and it raining, and him waiting at the door and being scared and going out the window and all.

The professor grinned when we asked him.

"Goodness gracious!" he said. "It was very simple indeed. You see, as I have already told you, the bird is a most remarkable one. Not only do its feathers contain green pigment, but that pigment is more or less fugitive. In other words, it 'runs' when wet, but instead of 'running' as a green color, it turns to red. The moment I saw the stuffed bird with the red stains on its feathers I knew that the man who had throttled it had to do so with wet hands. I also knew that it must have been his fingers and hands that had left the red stains on the window-ledge and door.

"It was quite obvious also that the murder had been committed *before* the bird had been killed, otherwise there would have been red marks on the murdered man's throat or clothing or on the cord that had been used to strangle him. Why, I asked myself, had the murderer's hands been wet? Why were there red

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The Feathered Detective

By A. Hyatt Verrill

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imprints on both the door and the window-ledge? I could think of no good reason for the man's wet hands other than that it had been raining, and in climbing in by the window he had wet his hands. But quite obviously, had his hands been wet when he first entered the room, they would not have remained wet during the time that he crept on his dozing victim, strangled him, searched through his pockets and perhaps ripped open the bags before killing the bird.

"Moreover, the presence of the fingerprints on the door convinced me that he had decided to leave that way and had changed his mind and had gone by the window. Why should he have taken even that risk of going by the door? Rain, hard rain again, I decided. And your answers to my enquiries proved that it *had* rained, severely, during that night. I could not picture the murderer, soaked and dripping, climbing into the window to commit

murder. Besides if it had been raining, the occupant of the room would, in all likelihood, have closed and bolted his window before he dozed off. Yet I felt sure the man who had killed the bird had just come in from the rain. I put two and two together and the answer was he must have left the room and returned to it after it began to rain. For what reason? In all probability to secure a tool or an instrument with which to cut open the bags. And you see, gentlemen, I *was* right in my deductions. But the credit is not mine. The credit should go to the bird, the feathered detective in the case, for had it been a parrot or any other bird on earth, the mystery might never have been solved."

"Well" says I, "I can see now what Big Ben meant when he said it was a most remarkable bird, in fact *the* most remarkable of birds."

"And he was right enough at that."

THE END
