

# The Innocence of Father Brown

## The Sign of the Broken Sword—By G. K. Chesterton

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE GIBBS

THE thousand arms of the forest were gray and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue, like slate, the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly-wooded and sparsely-tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost. The black hollows between the trunks of the trees looked like bottomless black caverns of that heartless Scandinavian hell—a hell of incalculable cold. Even the square stone tower of the church looked northern to the point of heathenry, as if it were some barbaric tower among the sea rocks of Iceland. It was a queer night for any one to explore a churchyard. But, on the other hand, it was a queer churchyard and, perhaps, worth exploring.

It rose abruptly out of the ashen wastes of forest in a sort of hump, or shoulder, of green turf that looked gray in the starlight. Most of the graves were on a slant, and the path leading up to the church was as steep as a staircase. On the top of the hill, in the one flat and prominent place, was the monument for which the place was famous. It contrasted strangely with the featureless graves all around; for it was the work of one of the greatest sculptors of modern Europe. And yet his fame was at once forgotten in the fame of the man whose image he had made. It showed, by touches of the small silver pencil of starlight, the massive metal figure of a soldier recumbent, the strong hands seated in an everlasting worship, the great head pillowed upon a gun. The venerable face was bearded, or rather whiskered, in the old, heavy Colonel Newcome fashion. The uniform, though suggested with the few strokes of simplicity, was that of modern war. By his right side lay a sword, of which the tip was broken off; on the left side lay a Bible. On glowing summer afternoons came wagonets full of Americans and cultured suburbans to see the sepulcher; but even then they felt the vast forest land with its one dumpy dome of churchyard and church as a place oddly dumb and neglected. In this freezing darkness of midwinter one would think he might be left alone with the stars. Nevertheless, in the stillness of those stiff woods an iron latch rasped and a wooden gate creaked, and two dim figures, dressed in black, climbed up the little path to the tomb.



The Black Letters Which So Many Americans Had Reverently Read

So faint was that frigid starlight that nothing could have been traced about them except that, though they both wore black, one man was enormously big, and the other—perhaps by contrast—almost startlingly small. They went up to the great graven tomb of the historic warrior and stood for a few minutes, staring at it. There was no human, perhaps no living, thing for a wide circle; and a morbid fancy might well have wondered if they were human themselves. In any case, the beginning of their conversation might have seemed strange. After the first silence the small man said to the other: "Where does a wise man hide a pebble?"

And the tall man answered in a low voice: "On the beach."

The small man nodded and after a short silence said: "Where does a wise man hide a leaf?"

And the other answered: "In the forest." There was another stillness, and then the tall man resumed: "Do you mean that when a wise man has to hide a real diamond he has been known to hide it among sham ones?"

"No, no," said the little man with a laugh. "We will let bygones be bygones."

He stamped with the cold for a second or two, and then said: "I'm not thinking of that at all, but of something else—something rather peculiar. Just strike a match, will you?"

The big man fumbled in his pocket and soon a scratch and a flare painted gold the whole flat side of the monument. On it were cut, in black letters, the well-known words which so many Americans had reverently read:

Sacrificed to the Memory of General Sir Arthur St. Clare, Hero and Martyr, Who Always Vanquished His Enemies and Always Spared Them, and Was Treacherously Slain by Them at Last. May God in Whom He Trusted Both Reward and Revenge Him.

The match burnt the big man's fingers, blackened and dropped. He was about to strike another, but his small companion stopped him. "That's all right, Flambeau, old man; I saw what I wanted. Or, rather, I didn't see what I didn't want. And now we must walk a mile and a half to the next inn, and I will try to tell you all about it. For, Heaven knows, a man should have fire and ale when he dares tell such a story."

They descended the precipitous path. They related the rusty gate and set off at a stamping, ringing walk down the frozen forest road. They had gone a full quarter of a mile before the smaller man spoke again. He said: "Yes; the wise man hides a pebble on the beach. But what does he do if there is no beach? Do you know anything of that great St. Clare trouble?"

"I know nothing about English generals, Father Brown," answered the larger man, laughing, "though a little about English policemen. I only know that you have dragged me a precious long dance to all the shrines of this fellow, whoever he is. One would think he got buried in six different places. I've seen a memorial to General St. Clare in Westminster Abbey. I've seen a ramping equestrian statue of General St. Clare on the Embankment. I've seen a medallion of General St. Clare in the street he was born in and another in the street he lived in. And now you drag me after dark to his coffin in the village churchyard. I am beginning to be a bit tired of his magnificent personality, especially as I don't in the least know who he was. What are you hunting for in all these crypts and effigies?"

"I am only looking for one word," said Father Brown. "A word that isn't there."

"Well," asked Flambeau, "are you going to tell me anything about it?"

"I must divide it into two parts," remarked the priest. "First, there is what everybody knows; and, then, there is what I know. Now, what everybody knows is short and plain enough. It is also entirely wrong."

"Right you are," said the big man called Flambeau cheerfully. "Let's begin at the wrong end. Let's begin with what everybody knows, which isn't true."

"If not wholly untrue, it is, at least, very inadequate," continued Father Brown, "for, in point of fact, all that the public knows amounts precisely to this: The public knows that Arthur St. Clare was a great and successful English general. It knows that, after splendid, yet careful, campaigns, both in India and Africa, he was in command against Brazil when the great Brazilian patriot, Olivier, issued his ultimatum. It knows that, on that occasion, St. Clare, with a very small force, attacked Olivier with a very large one, and was captured after heroic resistance. And it knows that, after his capture and the abhorrence of the civilized world, St. Clare was hanged on the nearest tree. He was found swinging there, after the Brazilians had retired, with his broken sword hung derisively around his neck."

"And that popular story is true?" suggested Flambeau. "No," said his friend quietly; "that story is quite true—so far as it goes."

"Well, I think it goes far enough," said Flambeau. "But if the popular story is true, what is the mystery?"

They had passed many hundreds of gray and ghostly trees before the little priest answered. Then he bit his finger reflectively and said: "Why, the mystery is a mystery of psychology. Or, rather, it is a mystery of two psychologies. In that Brazilian business two of the most famous men of modern history acted fast against their characters. Mind you, Olivier and St. Clare were both heroes—and no mistake. It was like the fight between Hector and Achilles. Now, what would you say to an affair in which Achilles was timid and Hector was treacherous?"

"Go on," said the large man impatiently, as the other bit his finger again.

"Sir Arthur St. Clare was a soldier of the old religious type—the type that saved us during the Mutiny," continued Brown. "He was always more for duty than for



"By the Singing River and the Jantit Palms"

dash and, with all his personal courage, was decidedly a prudent commander, particularly indignant at any needless waste of soldiers. Yet, in this last battle, he attempted something that a baby could see was absurd. One need not be a soldier to see it was as wild as wind, just as one need not be a soldier to keep out of the way of a motor bus. Well, that is the first mystery: What had become of the English general's head? The second riddle is, What had become of the Brazilian general's heart? President Olivier might be called a visionary or a nuisance, but even his enemies admitted that he was magnanimous to the point of knight errantry. Almost every other prisoner he had ever captured had been set free, or even loaded with benefits. Men who had really wronged him came away touched by his simplicity and sweetness. Why the deuce should he diabolically revenge himself only once in his life, and that for the one particular blow that could not have hurt him? Well, there you have it. One of the wisest men in the world acted like an idiot for no reason. One of the best men in the world acted like a devil for no reason. That's the long and the short of it, and I leave it to you, my boy."

"No, you don't," said the other with a snort. "I leave it to you, and you can jolly well tell me all about it."

"Well," resumed Father Brown, "it's not fair to say that the public impression is just what I've said, without adding that two things have happened since. I can't say they threw a new light, for nobody can make sense of them. But they threw a new kind of darkness—they threw the darkness in new directions. The first was this. The family physician of the St. Clares quarreled with that family and began publishing a violent series of articles, in which he said that the late general was a religious maniac, but, as far as the tale went, this seemed to mean little more than a religious man. Anyhow, the story fizzled out. Every one knew, of course, that St. Clare had some of the eccentricities of Puritan piety. The second incident was much more arresting. In the luckless and unsupported regiment which made that rash attempt at the Black River there was a certain Captain Keith, who was at that time engaged to St. Clare's daughter, and who afterward married her. He was one of those who were captured by Olivier and, like all the rest except the general, appears to have been bounteously treated and promptly set free. Some twenty years afterward this man, then Lieutenant Colonel Keith, published a sort of autobiography called A British Officer in Burmah and Brazil. In the place where the reader looks eagerly for some account of the mystery of St. Clare's disaster may be

its light the narrator had been able to refresh his memory of Captain Keith's text from a scrap of printed paper. As he folded it up and put it back in his pocket Flambeau threw up his hand with a French gesture.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit!" he cried excitedly. "I believe I can guess it at the first go."

He strode on, breathing hard, his black head and bull neck forward, like a man winning a walking race. The little priest, amused and interested, had some trouble in trotting beside him. Just before them the trees fell back a little to left and right and the road swept downward across a clear, moonlit valley, till it died again like a rabbit into the wall of another wood. The entrance to the farther forest looked small and round like the black hole of a remote railway tunnel. But it was wide, some hundred yards and gaped like a cavern before Flambeau spoke again.

"I've got it!" he cried at last, slapping his thigh with his great hand. "Four minutes' thinking, and I can tell you whole story myself."

"All right," assented Father Brown. "You tell it."

Flambeau lifted his head but lowered his voice. "General Sir Arthur St. Clare," he said, "came of a family in which madness was hereditary, and his whole aim was to keep this from his daughter, and even, if possible, from his future son-in-law. Rightly or wrongly, he thought the final collapse was close, and resolved on suicide. Yet, ordinary suicide would blazon the very idea he dreaded. As the campaign approached the clouds came thicker on his brain, and at last, in a mad moment, he sacrificed his public duty to his private. He rushed rashly into battle, hoping to fall by the first shot. When he found that he had only attained capture and discredit, the bomb in his brain burst, and he broke his own sword and hanged himself."

He stared firmly at the gray facade of forest in front of him, with the one black gap in it, like the mouth of the grave, into which their path plunged. Perhaps something menacing in the road, thus suddenly swallowed, reinforced his vivid vision of the tragedy, for he shuddered.

"A horrid story," he said.

"A horrid story," repeated the priest with bent head.

"But it's the real story."

Then he turned back his head with a sort of despair, and cried: "Oh, I wish it had been!"

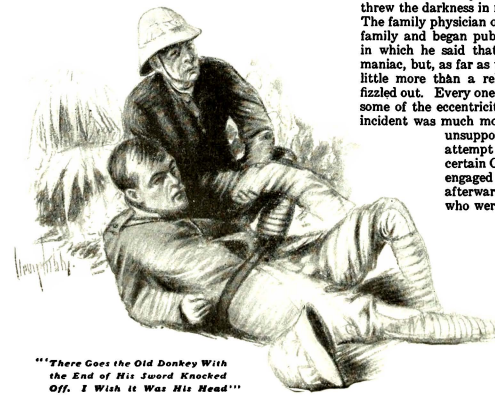
The tall Flambeau faced round and stared at him.

"Yours is a clean story," cried Father Brown, deeply moved. "A sweet, pure, honest story, as open and white as that moon. Madness and despair are innocent enough. There are worse things, Flambeau."

Flambeau looked up with a moon thus invoked, and from where he stood one black tree bough curved across it exactly like a devil's horn.

"Father—Father!" cried Flambeau with the French gesture and stepping yet more rapidly forward. "Do you mean it was worse than that?"

"Worse than that," said the priest like an echo. And they plunged into the black cloister of the woodland,



"There Goes the Old Donkey With the End of His Sword Knocked Off. I Wish It Was His Head!"



which ran by them in a dim tapestry of trunks, like one of the dark corridors in a dream.

They were soon in the most secret entrails of the wood and there close but there, foliage that they could not see, when the priest said again:

"Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there be no forest?"

"Well, well," cried Flambeau irritably, "what does he do?"

"He grows a forest to hide it in," said the priest in an obscure voice. "A fearful sin."

"There is here," he said impatiently, for the dark wood and the dark sayings gave a little on his nerves, "will you tell me this story or not? What other evidence is there to go on?"

"There are three more bits of evidence," said the other, "that I have dug up in holes and corners, and I will give them in logical, rather than chronological, order. First of all, of course, our authority for the issue and event of the battle is in Olivier's own dispatches, which are lucid enough."

He was entrenched with two or three regiments on the heights that swept down to the Black River; on the other side was lower and more marshy ground. Beyond this again was gently rising country on which was the first English outpost, supported by others which lay, however, considerably in its rear. The British forces, as a whole, were greatly superior in numbers, but this particular regiment was just far enough from its base to make Olivier consider the project of crossing the river to cut it off at sunset, however he had decided to retain his own position, which was a specially strong one. At daybreak next morning he was thunderstruck to see that this straggling handful of English, entirely unsupported from their rear, had flung themselves across the river, half by a bridge to the right and the other half by a ford some way upstream, and were massed upon the marshy bank below him.

That they should attempt an attack with such numbers against a position was incredible enough, but Olivier noted something more extraordinary.

For, instead of attempting to seize more solid ground, this mad regiment, having put the river in its rear by one wild charge, did nothing more. It stuck there in the mire like flies in treacle.

Needless to say the Brazilians blew great gaps in them with artillery, which they could only return with spirited, but lessening, rifle fire. Yet that they never broke, and Olivier's curt account ends with a strong tribute of admiration for the mystic value of these imbeciles. "Our line then advanced, finally," writes Olivier, "and drove them into the river. We captured General St. Clare himself and several other officers."

The colonel and the major had both fallen in the battle. I cannot resist saying that few finer sights can have been seen in history than the last stand of this extraordinary regiment: wounded officers picking up the rifles of dead soldiers, and the general himself facing up on horseback, bareheaded and with a broken sword."

On what happened to the general afterward Olivier is as silent as Captain Keith.

"Well," grunted his companion, "get on to the next bit of evidence."

"The next evidence," said Father Brown, "took some time to find, but it will not take long to tell. I found at last, in an almshouse down in the Lincolnshire Fens, an old soldier who not only was wounded at the Black River, but had actually knelt beside the colonel of the regiment when he died. This latter was a certain Colonel Clancy, a big bull of an Irishman, and it would seem that he died almost as much of rage as of bullets. He, at any rate, was not responsible for that ridiculous raid—it must have been imposed on him by the general. His last edifying words, according to my informant, were these: 'And there goes the old donkey with the end of his sword knocked off. I wish it was his head.' You will remark that every one seems to have noticed this detail about the broken sword blade, though most people regard it as somewhat merely convenient than did the late Colonel Clancy. And now for the third fragment."

Their path through the woodland began to go upward, and the speaker paused a little for breath before he went on. Then he continued in the same businesslike tone:

"Only a month or two ago a certain Brazilian official died in England, having quarreled with Olivier and left his country. He was a well-known figure, both here and on the continent, a Spaniard named Espado. I knew him

myself, a yellow-faced old dandy with a hooked nose. For various private reasons I had permission to see the documents he had left. He was a Catholic, of course, and I had been with him toward the end. There was nothing of his that lit up any corner of the black St. Clare business except five or six common exercise books filled with the diary of some English soldier. I can only suppose that it was found by the Brazilians on one of those that fell. Anyhow, it stopped abruptly the night before the battle.

"But the account of that last day in the poor fellow's life was certainly worth reading. I have it on me, but it's too dark to read it here and I will give you a résumé. The first part of that entry is full of jokes, evidently flung about among the men, about somebody called the Vulture. It does not seem as if this person, whoever he was, was one of themselves, nor even an Englishman. Neither is he exactly spoken of as one of the enemy. It sounds rather as if he were some local go-between and non-combatant—perhaps a guide or a journalist. He has been closeted with old Colonel Clancy, but is more often seen talking to the major. Indeed, the major is somewhat prominent in this soldier's narrative: a lean, dark-haired man, apparently, of the name of Murray. A North of Ireland man and a Puritan. There are continual jests about the contrast between this Ulsterman's austerity and the conviviality of Colonel Clancy. There is also some joke about the Vulture wearing bright-colored clothes.

"But all these levities are scattered by what may well be called the note of a trumpet. Behind the English camp and almost parallel to the river ran one of the few great roads of that district. Westward the road curved round toward the river, which it crossed by the bridge before mentioned. To the east the road swept backward into the wilds, and some two miles along it was the next English outpost. From this direction there came along the road, that evening, a glitter and clatter of light cavalry in which even the simple diarist could recognize with astonishment the general with his staff. He rode the great white horse which you have seen so often in illustrated papers and

vanished behind a clump of trees where the road turned toward the river. The colonel had gone back to the tent and the men to their pickets. The man with the diary lingered for four minutes and saw a marvelous sight.

"The great white horse which had marched slowly down the road, as if it had marched in so many processions, flew back, galloping up the road toward them as if it were mad to win a race. At first they thought it had run away with the man on its back, but they soon saw that the general, a fine rider, was himself urging it to full speed. Horse and man swept up to them like a whirlwind, and then, reining up the reeling charger, the general turned them a face like a flame and called for the colonel like the trumpet that wakes the dead.

"I conceive that all the earthquake events of that catastrophe tumbled on top of each other rather like lumber in the minds of men like our friend with the diary. With the dazed excitement of a dream they found themselves falling—literally falling—into their ranks and learned that an attack was to be led at once across the river. The general and the major, it was said, had found out something at the bridge and there was only just time to strike for life. The major had gone back at once to call up the reserve along the road behind. It was doubtful if, even with that prompt appeal, help could reach them in time. But they must pass the stream that night and seize the heights by morning. It is with the very stir and throbs of that romantic nocturnal march that the diary suddenly ends."

Father Brown had mounted ahead, for the woodland path grew smaller, steeper and more twisted, till they felt as if they were ascending a winding staircase. The priest's voice came from above out of the darkness.

"There was one other little and enormous thing. When the general urged them to their chivalric charge he half drew his sword from the scabbard, and then, as if ashamed of such melodrama, thrust it back. The sword again."

A half light broke through the darkness of the woods above them, flinging the ghost of a net about their feet, for they were mounting again to the faint luminosity of the naked night. Flambeau felt truth all around him, as an atmosphere, but not as an idea. He answered with bewildered brain:

"Well, what's the matter with the sword? Officers generally have swords."

"They are not often mentioned in modern war," said the other dispassionately; "but in this affair one falls over the blessed sword everywhere."

"Well, what is there in that?" growled Flambeau. "It was a two-piece colored sort of incident, the old man's made breaking in his last battle. Any one might bet the papers would get hold of it—as they have. On all these tombs and things it's shown broken at the point. I hope you haven't dragged me through this blasted Polar expedition merely because two men, with an eye for a picture, saw St. Clare's broken sword."

"No," cried Father Brown with a sharp voice like a pistol shot; "but who saw his unbroken sword?"

"What do you mean?" cried the other, and stood still under the stars. They had come abruptly out of the gray gates of the wood.

"I say, who saw his unbroken sword?" repeated Father Brown obstinately. "Not the writer of the diary, anyhow—the general sheathed it in time."

Flambeau looked about him in the moonlight as a man struck blind might look in the sun, and his friend, for the first time, went on with eagerness:

"Oh!" said his friend, "I can prove it, even after hunting through the tombs. But I am sure of it. Let me add just one more tiny fact that tops the whole thing over. The colonel, by a strange chance, was one of the first struck by a bullet. He was struck long before the troops came to close quarters. But he saw St. Clare's sword broken. Why was it broken? How was it broken? My friend, it was broken before the battle."

"And pray where is the other piece?" asked the other, with a forlorn jocularity.

"I can tell you," said the priest promptly. "In the cemetery of the Protestant Cathedral at Belfast."

"Indeed?" inquired Flambeau. "Did you look for it?"

"I couldn't," said the priest with regret. "There's a great marble monument on top of it: a monument to the



"He is Saying Farewell to the Great Enemy"

accompany pictures, and you may be sure that the salute they gave him was not merely ceremonial. He, at least, wasted no time on ceremony but, springing from the saddle, immediately mixed with the group of officers and fell into emphatic though confidential speech. What struck our friend, the diarist, most was his special disposition to discuss matters with Major Murray; but, indeed, such a selection, so long as it was not marked, was in no way unnatural. The two men were made for sympathy. They were men who read their Bibles; they were both the old Evangelical type of officer. However this may be, it is certain that when the general mounted again he was still talking earnestly to Murray, and that, as he walked his horse slowly down the road toward the river, the tall Ulsterman still walked by his bridle-rein, in earnest debate. The soldiers watched the two until they

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## The Innocence of Father Brown

(Continued from Page 11)

heroic Major Murray who fell fighting gloriously at the battle of the Black River. Flambeau seemed suddenly galvanised into existence. "You mean," he cried hoarsely, "that General St. Clare hated Murray and murdered him on the field of battle because—"

"You are still full of good and pure thoughts," said the other. "It was worse than that."

"Well," said the large man, "my stock of evil imagination is used up."

The priest started really doubtful where to begin, and at last he said again:

"Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest."

The other did not answer.

"If there were no forest he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf he would make a dead forest."

There was still no reply and the priest added, still more doubtful:

"And if a man had to hide a dead body he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in."

Flambeau began to stamp forward with an intolerance of delay in time or space, but Father Brown went on, as if he were continuing the last sentence:

"Sir Arthur St. Clare, as I have already said, was a man who hid his Bible. That was what was the matter with him. When will people understand that it is useless for a man to read his Bible unless he also reads everybody else's Bible? A printer reads a Bible for misprint reads it for Heaven's sake, and a Christian Scientist reads his and finds that which he seeks. St. Clare was an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier. Now just think what that might mean, and for Heaven's sake, don't cant about it. It might mean a man, physically formidable, living under a tropic sun in an Oriental society, and soaking himself, without sense or guidance, in an Oriental book. Of course he read the Old Testament rather than the New. Of course he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted—tyranny, treason. Oh, I dare say he was honest, as you call it. But what is the good of a man being honest in his worship of dishonesty?"

"In each of the hot and secret countries to which that man went he kept a harem, he tortured witnesses, he amassed shameful gold, but certainly he would have said, with steady eyes, that he did it to the glory of the Lord. My own theology is sufficiently expressed by asking which Lord? Anyhow there is this about such evil, that it opens door after door in hell and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime—that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner. St. Clare was soon suffocated by difficulties, of bribery and blackmail—and needed more and more cash. And by the time of the battle of the Black River he had fallen from world to world to that place which Dante makes the lowest floor of the universe."

"What do you mean?" asked his friend again.

"I mean *that*," retorted the cleric, and suddenly pointed at a puddle sealed with ice that shone in the moon. "Do you remember whom Dante put in the last circle of ice?"

"The traitors," said Flambeau, and shuddered. As he looked around at the inhuman landscape of trees with taunting and almost obscure outlines, he could almost fancy Dante, and the priest, with the rivulet of a voice was, indeed, a Vergil, leading him through a land of eternal sins.

The voice went on: "Olivier, as you know, was quick-witted, and would not permit a secret service and spies. The thing, however, was done, like many other things, behind his back. It was managed by my old friend, Espado. He was a bright-eyed fox, whose hook nose got him called the Vulture. Posing as a sort of philanthropist at the front, he felt his way through the English army and, at last, got his fingers on its one corrupt man, and that man was on the top. St. Clare was in foul need of money and mountains of it. The discredited family doctor was threatening those extraordinary exposures that afterward began and were broken off, tales of monstrous and prehistoric things in Park Lane; things done by an English Evangelical that smelt like human sacrifice and hordes of slaves. Money was wanted, too,

for his daughter's dowry, to him the fame of wealth was as sweet as wealth itself. He snapped the last thread, whispered the word to Brazil, and wealth poured in from the enemies of England. But another man, as well as he, had talked to Espado, the Vulture. Somehow the dark, grim young major from Ulster had guessed the hideous truth, and when they walked slowly together down that road toward the bridge Murray was telling the general that he must resign instantly or be court-martialed and shot. The general temporized with him till they came to the fringe of tropic trees by the bridge, and there, by the singing river and the sunlit palms—for I can see the picture—the general drew his sabre and plunged it through the body of the major."

The wintry road curved over a ridge in cutting frost, with cruel black shapes of bush and thicket, but Flambeau fancied that he saw beyond it faintly the edge of an aureole that was not starlight and moonlight, but some fire such as is made by men. He watched it as the tale drew to its close.

"St. Clare was a hell-hound, but he was a hound of breed. Never, I'll swear, was he so lucid and so strong as when poor Murray lay a cold lump at his feet. Never in all his triumphs, as Captain Keith said truly, was the great man so great as he was in this last world-despised defeat. He looked coolly at his weapon to wipe off the blood. He saw the point he had planted between his victim's shoulders had broken off in the body. He saw quite calmly, as through a club window-pane, all that must follow. He saw that men must find the unaccountable corpse, must extract the unaccountable sword-point, must notice the unaccountable broken sword—or absence of sword. He had killed—but not silenced. But his imperious intellect rose against the fact; there was one way yet. He could make the corpse less unaccountable. He could create a hill of corpses to cover this one. In twenty minutes eight hundred English soldiers were marching down to their death."

The warmer glow behind the black winter wood grew richer and brighter, and Flambeau strode on to reach it. Father Brown also quickened his stride, but he seemed merely absorbed in his tale.

"Such was the valor of that English thousand, and such the genius of their commander, that, if they had at once attacked the hill, even their mad march might have met some luck. But the evil mind that played with them like pawns had other aims and reasons. They must remain in the marshes by the bridge at least till British corpses should be a common sight there. Then for the last grand scene, when the silver-haired soldier-saint would give up his shattered sword to save further slaughter! Oh, it was well organized for an impromptu. But I think—I cannot prove—I think that it was while they stuck there in the bloody mire that some one doubted—and some one guessed."

He was mute a moment and then said: "There is a voice from nowhere that tells me the man who guessed was the lover—the man to wed the old man's child."

"But what about Olivier and the hanging?" asked Flambeau.

"Olivier, partly from chivalry, partly from policy, seldom encumbered his march with captives," explained the narrator. "He released everybody in most cases. He released everybody in this case."

"Everybody but the general," said the tall man.

"Everybody," said the priest.

Flambeau knitted his black brows. "I don't grasp it all yet," he said.

"There is another picture, Flambeau," said Father Brown in his more mystical undertone. "I can't prove it, but I can do more—I can see it. There is a camp-breasting up on the bare, torn hills in the morning, and Brazilian uniforms massed in blocks and columns to march. There is the red shirt and long black beard of Olivier, which droops as he bows; his broad-brimmed hat in his hand. He is saying farewell to the great enemy, he is setting free the simple, snow-headed English veteran who thanks him in the name of his men. The English remain stand behind at attention. Beside them are stores and vehicles for their retreat. The drums roll, the Brazilians are moving, the English are still like statues. So they



abide till the last hum and flash of the enemy have faded from the tropic horizon. Then they alter their postures all at once like dead men coming to life. They turn their fifty faces upon the general—faces not to be forgotten."

Flambeau gave a great jump. "Ah!" he cried. "You don't mean—"

"Yes," said Father Brown in a deep, moving voice. "It was an English hand that put the rope around St. Clare's neck—the hand, I believe, that put the ring on his daughter's finger. They were English hands that dragged him up to the tree of shame—the hands of men who had adored him and followed him to victory. And they were English souls—God pardon and endure us all—who stared at him swinging in that foreign sun on the green gallows of palm, and prayed in their hatred that he might drop off it into hell."

As the two topped the ridge there burst on them the strong, scarlet light of a red-curtained English inn. It stood sideways in the road, as if standing aside in the amplitude of hospitality. Its three doors stood open with invitation, and even where they stood the two men could hear the hum and laughter of humanity happy for a night.

"I need not tell you more," said Father Brown. "They tried him in the wilderness and destroyed him, and then, for the honor of England and of his daughter, they took an oath to seal up forever the story of the traitor's purse and the assassin's sword-blade. Perhaps, Heaven help them, they tried to forget it! Let us try to forget it anyhow. Here is our inn."

"With all my heart," said Flambeau, and was just striding into the bright, noisy bar when he stepped back and almost fell on the road.

"Look there, in the devil's name!" he cried, and pointed rigidly at the square wooden sign that overhung the road. It showed dimly the crude shape of a saber hilt and a shortened blade, and was inscribed in false archaic lettering:

#### THE SIGN OF THE BROKEN SWORD

"Were you not prepared, Flambeau?" asked Father Brown gently. "He is the god of this country. Half the inns and parks and streets are named after him and his story."

"I thought we had done with the leper," cried Flambeau, and spat on the road.

"You will never have done with him in England," said the priest, looking down, "while brass is strong and stone abides. His marble statues will erect the souls of proud, innocent boys for centuries. His village tomb will smell of loyalty as of lilies. Millions who never knew him shall love him like a father—this man whom the last few that knew him dealt with like dung. He shall be a saint, and the truth shall never be told of him, because I have made up my mind at last. There is so much good and evil in breaking secrets that I put my conduct to a test. The anti-Brazil boom is already over. Olivier is already honored everywhere. But I told myself that if anywhere, by name, in metal or marble that will endure like the pyramids, Colonel Clancy or Captain Keith or President Olivier or any innocent man was wrongly blamed, then I would speak. If it were only that St. Clare was wrongly praised I would be silent. And I will."

They plunged into the red-curtained tavern, which was not only cozy but even luxurious inside. On a table stood a silver model of the tomb of St. Clare, the silver head bowed, the silver sword broken. On the walls were colored photographs of the same scene, and of the system of wagonets that took tourists to see it. They sat down on easy, padded benches. "Come, it's cold," cried Father Brown; "let's have some wine or beer."

"Or brandy," said Flambeau.

Editor's Note—This is the sixth of Mr. Chesterton's series of stories. The first of a new series will appear in an early number.

