

# Carleton Barker, First And Second

By John Kendrick Bangs

My first meeting with Carleton Barker was a singular one. A friend and I, in August, 18—, were doing the English Lake District on foot, when, on nearing the base of the famous Mount Skiddaw, we observed on the road, some distance ahead of us, limping along and apparently in great pain, the man whose subsequent career so sorely puzzled us. Noting his very evident distress, Parton and I quickened our pace and soon caught up with the stranger, who, as we reached his side, fell forward upon his face in a fainting condition—as well he might, for not only must he have suffered great agony from a sprained ankle, but inspection of his person disclosed a most extraordinary gash in his right arm, made apparently with a sharp knife, and which was bleeding most profusely. To stanch the flow of blood was our first care, and Parton, having recently been graduated in medicine, made short work of relieving the sufferer's pain from his ankle, bandaging it about and applying such soothing properties as he had in his knapsack—properties, by the way, with which, knowing the small perils to which pedestrians everywhere are liable, he was always provided.

Our patient soon recovered his senses and evinced no little gratitude for the service we had rendered him, insisting upon our accepting at his hands, merely, he said, as a souvenir of our good -Samaritanship, and as a token of his appreciation of the same, a small pocket-flask and an odd diamond-shaped stone pierced in the centre, which had hung from the end of his watch-chain, held in place by a minute gold ring. The flask became the property of Parton, and to me fell the stone, the exact hue of which I was never able to determine, since it was chameleonic in its properties. When it was placed in my hands by our "grateful patient" it was blood -red; when I looked upon it on the following morning it was of a livid, indescribable hue, yet lustrous as an opal. To-day it is colorless and dull, as though some animating quality that it had once possessed had forever passed from it.

"You seem to have met with an accident," said Parton, when the injured man had recovered sufficiently to speak.

"Yes," he said, wincing with pain, "I have. I set out for Saddleback this morning—I wished to visit the Scales Tarn and get a glimpse of those noonday stars that are said to make its waters lustrous, and—"

"And to catch the immortal fish?" I queried.

"No," he replied, with a laugh. "I should have been satisfied to see the stars—and I did see the stars, but not the ones I set out to see. I have always been more or less careless of my safety, walking with my head in the clouds and letting my feet look out for themselves. The result was that I slipped on a moss-covered stone and fell over a very picturesque bit of scenery on to some more stones that, unfortunately, were not moss-covered."

"But the cut in your arm?" said Parton, suspiciously. "That looks as if somebody else had given it to you."

The stranger's face flushed as red as could be considering the amount of blood he had lost, and a look of absolute devilishness that made my flesh creep came into his eyes. For a moment he did not speak, and then, covering the delay in his answer with a groan of anguish, he said:

"Oh, that! Yes—I—I did manage to cut myself rather badly and—"

"I don't see how you could, though," insisted Parton. "You couldn't reach that part of yourself with a knife, if you tried."

"That's just the reason why you should see for yourself that it was caused by my falling on my knife. I had it grasped in my right hand, intending to cut myself a stick, when I slipped. As I slipped it flew from my hand and I landed on it, fortunately on the edge and not on the point," he explained, his manner far from convincing, though the explanation seemed so simple that to doubt it were useless.

"Did you recover the knife?" asked Parton. "It must have been a mighty sharp one, and rather larger than most people carry about with them on excursions like yours."

"I am not on the witness-stand, sir," returned the other, somewhat petulantly, "and so I fail to see why you should question me so closely in regard to so simple a matter—as though you suspected me of some wrongdoing."

"My friend is a doctor," I explained; for while I was quite as much interested in the incident, its whys and wherefores, as was Parton, I had myself noticed that he was suspicious of his chance patient, and seemingly not so sympathetic as he would otherwise have been. "He regards you as a case."

"Not at all," returned Parton. "I am simply interested to know how you hurt yourself—that is all. I mean no offence, I am sure, and if anything I have said has hurt your feelings I apologize."

"Don't mention it, doctor," replied the other, with an uneasy smile, holding his left hand out towards Parton as he spoke. "I am in great pain, as you know, and perhaps I seem irritable. I'm not an amiable man at best; as for the knife, in my agony I never thought to look for it again, though I suppose if I had looked I should not have found it, since it doubtless fell into the underbrush out of sight. Let it rest there. It has not done me a friendly service to-day and I shall waste no tears over it."

With which effort at pleasantry he rose with some difficulty to his feet, and with the assistance of Parton and myself walked on and into Keswick, where we stopped for the night. The stranger registered directly ahead of Parton and myself, writing the words, "Carleton Barker, Calcutta," in the book, and immediately retired to his room, nor did we see him again that night. After supper we looked for him, but as he was nowhere to be seen, we concluded that he had gone to bed to seek the recuperation of rest. Parton and I lit our cigars and, though somewhat fatigued by our exertions, strolled quietly about the more or less somnolent burg in which we were, discussing the events of the day, and chiefly our new acquaintance.

"I don't half like that fellow," said Parton, with a dubious shake of the head. "If a dead body should turn up near or on Skiddaw to-morrow morning, I wouldn't like to wager that Mr. Carleton Barker hadn't put it there. He acted to me like a man who had something to conceal, and if I could have done it without seeming ungracious, I'd have flung his old flask as far into the fields as I could. I've half a mind to show my contempt for it now by filling it with some of that beastly claret they have at the *table d'hote* here, and chucking the whole thing into the lake. It was an insult to offer those things to us."

"I think you are unjust, Parton," I said. "He certainly did look as if he had been in a maul with somebody. There was a nasty scratch on his face, and that cut on the arm was suspicious; but I can't see but that his explanation was clear enough. Your manner was too irritating. I think if I had met with an accident and was assisted by an utter stranger who, after placing me under obligations to him, acted towards me as though I were an unconvicted criminal, I'd be as mad as he was; and as for the insult of his offering, in my eyes that was the only way he could soothe his injured feelings. He was angry at your suspicions, and to be entirely your debtor for services

didn't please him. His gift to me was made simply because he did not wish to pay you in substance and me in thanks."

"I don't go so far as to call him an unconvicted criminal, but I'll swear his record isn't clear as daylight, and I'm morally convinced that if men's deeds were written on their foreheads Carleton Barker, esquire, would wear his hat down over his eyes. I don't like him. I instinctively dislike him. Did you see the look in his eyes when I mentioned the knife?"

"I did," I replied. "And it made me shudder."

"It turned every drop of blood in my veins cold," said Parton. "It made me feel that if he had had that knife within reach he would have trampled it to powder, even if every stamp of his foot cut his flesh through to the bone. Malignant is the word to describe that glance, and I'd rather encounter a rattle-snake than see it again."

Parton spoke with such evident earnestness that I took refuge in silence. I could see just where a man of Parton's temperament—which was cold and eminently judicial even when his affections were concerned—could find that in Barker at which to cavil, but, for all that, I could not sympathize with the extreme view he took of his character. I have known many a man upon whose face nature has set the stamp of the villain much more deeply than it was impressed upon Barker's countenance, who has lived a life most irreproachable, whose every act has been one of unselfishness and for the good of mankind; and I have also seen outward appearing saints whose every instinct was base; and it seemed to me that the physiognomy of the unfortunate victim of the moss-covered rock and vindictive knife was just enough of a medium between that of the irredeemable sinner and the sterling saint to indicate that its owner was the average man in the matter of vices and virtues. In fact, the malignancy of his expression when the knife was mentioned was to me the sole point against him, and had I been in his position I do not think I should have acted very differently, though I must add that if I thought myself capable of freezing any person's blood with an expression of my eyes I should be strongly tempted to wear blue glasses when in company or before a mirror.

"I think I'll send my card up to him, Jack," I said to Parton, when we had returned to the hotel, "just to ask how he is. Wouldn't you?"

"No!" snapped Parton. "But then I'm not you. You can do as you please. Don't let me influence you against him—if he's to your taste."

"He isn't at all to my taste," I retorted. "I don't care for him particularly, but it seems to me courtesy requires that we show a little interest in his welfare."

"Be courteous, then, and show your interest," said Parton. "I don't care as long as I am not dragged into it."

I sent my card up by the boy, who, returning in a moment, said that the door was locked, adding that when he had knocked upon it there came no answer, from which he presumed that Mr. Barker had gone to sleep.

"He seemed all right when you took his supper to his room?" I queried.

"He said he wouldn't have any supper. Just wanted to be left alone," said the boy.

"Sulking over the knife still, I imagine," sneered Parton; and then he and I retired to our room and prepared for bed.

I do not suppose I had slept for more than an hour when I was awakened by Parton, who was pacing the floor like a caged tiger, his eyes all ablaze, and laboring under an intense nervous excitement.

"What's the matter, Jack?" I asked, sitting up in bed.

"That damned Barker has upset my nerves," he replied. "I can't get him out of my mind."

“Oh, pshaw!” I replied. “Don’t be silly. Forget him.”

“Silly?” he retorted, angrily. “Silly? Forget him? Hang it, I would forget him if he’d let me—but he won’t.”

“What has he got to do with it?”

“More than is decent,” ejaculated Parton. “More than is decent. He has just been peering in through that window there, and he means no good.”

“Why, you’re mad,” I remonstrated. “He couldn’t peer in at the window—we are on the fourth floor, and there is no possible way in which he could reach the window, much less peer in at it.”

“Nevertheless,” insisted Parton, “Carleton Barker for ten minutes previous to your waking was peering in at me through that window there, and in his glance was that same malignant, hateful quality that so set me against him to-day—and another thing, Bob,” added Parton, stopping his nervous walk for a moment and shaking his finger impressively at me—“another thing which I did not tell you before because I thought it would fill you with that same awful dread that has come to me since meeting Barker—the blood from that man’s arm, the blood that stained his shirt-sleeve crimson, that besmeared his clothes, spurted out upon my cuff and coat-sleeve when I strove to stanch its flow!”

“Yes, I remember that,” said I.

“And now look at my cuff and sleeve!” whispered Parton, his face grown white.

I looked.

There was no stain of any sort whatsoever upon either!

Certainly there must have been something wrong about Carleton Barker.

## II

The mystery of Carleton Barker was by no means lessened when next morning it was found that his room not only was empty, but that, as far as one could judge from the aspect of things therein, it had not been occupied at all. Furthermore, our chance acquaintance had vanished, leaving no more trace of his whereabouts than if he had never existed.

“Good riddance,” said Parton. “I am afraid he and I would have come to blows sooner or later, because the mere thought of him was beginning to inspire me with a desire to thrash him. I’m sure he deserves a trouncing, whoever he is.”

I, too, was glad the fellow had passed out of our ken, but not for the reason advanced by Parton. Since the discovery of the stainless cuff, where marks of blood ought by nature to have been, I goose-fleshed at the mention of his name. There was something so inexpressibly uncanny about a creature having a fluid of that sort in his veins. In fact, so unpleasantly was I impressed by that episode that I was unwilling even to join in a search for the mysteriously missing Barker, and by common consent Parton and I dropped him entirely as a subject for conversation.

We spent the balance of our week at Keswick, using it as our head-quarters for little trips about the surrounding country, which is most charmingly adapted to the wants of those inclined to pedestrianism, and on Sunday evening began preparations for our departure, discarding our knickerbockers and resuming the habiliments of urban life, intending on Monday morning to run up to Edinburgh, there to while away a few days before starting for a short trip through the Trossachs.

While engaged in packing our portmanteaux there came a sharp knock at the door, and upon opening it I found upon the hall floor an envelope addressed to myself. There was no one anywhere in the hall, and, so quickly had I opened the door after the knock, that fact mystified

me. It would hardly have been possible for any person, however nimble of foot, to have passed out of sight in the period which had elapsed between the summons and my response.

“What is it?” asked Parton, observing that I was slightly agitated.

“Nothing,” I said, desirous of concealing from him the matter that bothered me, lest I should be laughed at for my pains. “Nothing, except a letter for me.”

“Not by post, is it?” he queried; to which he added, “Can’t be. There is no mail here to-day. Some friend?”

“I don’t know,” I said, trying, in a somewhat feminine fashion, to solve the authorship of the letter before opening it by staring at the superscription. “I don’t recognize the handwriting at all.”

I then opened the letter, and glancing hastily at the signature was filled with uneasiness to see who my correspondent was.

“It’s from that fellow Barker,” I said.

“Barker!” cried Parton. “What on earth has Barker been writing to you about?”

“He is in trouble,” I replied, as I read the letter.

“Financial, I presume, and wants a lift?” suggested Parton.

“Worse than that,” said I, “he is in prison in London.”

“Wha-a-at?” ejaculated Parton. “In prison in London? What for?”

“On suspicion of having murdered an innkeeper in the South of England on Tuesday, August 16th.”

“Well, I’m sorry to say that I believe he was guilty,” returned Parton, without reflecting that the 16th day of August was the day upon which he and I had first encountered Barker.

“That’s your prejudice, Jack,” said I. “If you’ll think a minute you’ll know he was innocent. He was here on August 16th—last Tuesday. It was then that you and I saw him for the first time limping along the road and bleeding from a wound in the shoulder.”

“Was Tuesday the 16th?” said Parton, counting the days backward on his fingers. “That’s a fact. It was—but it’s none of my affair anyhow. It is too blessed queer for me to mix myself up in it, and I say let him languish in jail. He deserved it for something, I am sure—”

“Well, I’m not so confoundedly heartless,” I returned, pounding the table with my fist, indignant that Parton should allow his prejudices to run away with his sense of justice. “I’m going to London to do as he asks.”

“What does he want you to do? Prove an alibi?”

“Precisely; and I’m going and you’re going, and I shall see if the landlord here won’t let me take one of his boys along to support our testimony—at my own expense if need be.”

“You’re right, old chap,” returned Parton, after a moment of internal struggle. “I suppose we really ought to help the fellow out of his scrape; but I’m decidedly averse to getting mixed up in an affair of any kind with a man like Carleton Barker, much less in an affair with murder in it. Is he specific about the murder?”

“No. He refers me to the London papers of the 17th and 18th for details. He hadn’t time to write more, because he comes up for examination on Tuesday morning, and as our presence is essential to his case he was necessarily hurried.”

“It’s deucedly hard luck for us,” said Parton, ruefully. “It means no Scotland this trip.”

“How about Barker’s luck?” I asked. “He isn’t fighting for a Scottish trip—he’s fighting for his life.”

And so it happened that on Monday morning, instead of starting for Edinburgh, we boarded the train for London at Carlisle. We tried to get copies of the newspapers containing accounts of the crime that had been committed, but our efforts were unavailing, and it was not until we arrived in

London and were visited by Barker's attorneys that we obtained any detailed information whatsoever of the murder; and when we did get it we were more than ever regretful to be mixed up in it, for it was an unusually brutal murder. Strange to say, the evidence against Barker was extraordinarily convincing, considering that at the time of the commission of the crime he was hundreds of miles from the scene. There was testimony from railway guards, neighbors of the murdered innkeeper, and others, that it was Barker and no one else who committed the crime. His identification was complete, and the wound in his shoulder was shown almost beyond the possibility of doubt to have been inflicted by the murdered man in self-defence.

"Our only hope," said the attorney, gravely, "is in proving an alibi. I do not know what to believe myself, the chain of evidence against my client is so complete; and yet he asserts his innocence, and has stated to me that you two gentlemen could assist in proving it. If you actually encountered Carleton Barker in the neighborhood of Keswick on the 16th of this month, the whole case against him falls to the ground. If not, I fear his outlook has the gallows at the small end of the perspective."

"We certainly did meet a Carleton Barker at Keswick on Tuesday, August 16th," returned Parton; "and he was wounded in the shoulder, and his appearance was what might have been expected of one who had been through just such a frightful murder as we understand this to have been; but this was explained to us as due to a fall over rocks in the vicinity of the Scales Tarn—which was plausible enough to satisfy my friend here."

"And not yourself?" queried the attorney.

"Well, I don't see what that has to do with it," returned Parton. "As to the locality there is no question. He was there. We saw him, and others saw him, and we have taken the trouble to come down here to state the fact, and have brought with us the call-boy from the hotel, who can support our testimony if it is not regarded as sufficient. I advise you, however, as attorney for Barker, not to inquire too deeply into that matter, because I am convinced that if he isn't guilty of this crime—as of course he is not—he hasn't the cleanest record in the world. He has had written on every line of his face, and there were one or two things connected with our meeting with him that mightn't be to his taste to have mentioned in court."

"I don't need advice, thank you," said the attorney, dryly. "I wish simply to establish the fact of his presence at Keswick at the hour of 5 P.M. on Tuesday, August 16th. That was the hour at which the murder is supposed—in fact, is proved—to have been committed. At 5.30, according to witnesses, my client was seen in the neighborhood, faint with loss of blood from a knife-wound in the shoulder. Barker has the knife-wound, but he might have a dozen of them and be acquitted if he wasn't in Frewenton on the day in question."

"You may rely upon us to prove that," said I. "We will swear to it. We can produce tangible objects presented to us on that afternoon by Barker—"

"I can't produce mine," said Parton. "I threw it into the lake."

"Well, I can produce the stone he gave me," said I, "and I'll do it if you wish."

"That will be sufficient, I think," returned the attorney. "Barker spoke especially about that stone, for it was a half of an odd souvenir of the East, where he was born, and he fortunately has the other half. The two will fit together at the point where the break was made, and our case will be complete."

The attorney then left us. The following day we appeared at the preliminary examination, which proved to be the whole examination as well, since, despite the damning circumstantial evidence against Barker, evidence which shook my belief almost in the veracity of my own eyes, our plain statements, substantiated by the evidence of the call-boy and the two halves of the

oriental pebble, one in my possession and the other in Barker's, brought about the discharge of the prisoner from custody; and the "Frewenton Atrocity" became one of many horrible murders, the mystery of which time alone, if anything, could unravel.

After Barker was released he came to me and thanked me most effusively for the service rendered him, and in many ways made himself agreeable during the balance of our stay in London. Parton, however, would have nothing to do with him, and to me most of his attentions were paid. He always had a singularly uneasy way about him, as though he were afraid of some impending trouble, and finally after a day spent with him slumming about London—and a more perfect slummer no one ever saw, for he was apparently familiar with every one of the worst and lowest resorts in all of London as well as on intimate terms with leaders in the criminal world—I put a few questions to him impertinently pertinent to himself. He was surprisingly frank in his answers. I was quite prepared for a more or less indignant refusal when I asked him to account for his intimacy with these dregs of civilization.

"It's a long story," he said, "but I'll tell it to you. Let us run in here and have a chop, and I'll give you some account of myself over a mug of ale."

We entered one of the numerous small eating-houses that make London a delight to the lover of the chop in the fulness of its glory. When we were seated and the luncheon ordered Barker began.

"I have led a very unhappy life. I was born in India thirty-nine years ago, and while my every act has been as open and as free of wrong as are those of an infant, I have constantly been beset by such untoward affairs as this in which you have rendered such inestimable service. At the age of five, in Calcutta, I was in peril of my liberty on the score of depravity, although I never committed any act that could in any sense be called depraved. The main cause of my trouble at that time was a small girl of ten whose sight was partially destroyed by the fiendish act of some one who, according to her statement, wantonly hurled a piece of broken glass into one of her eyes. The girl said it was I who did it, although at the time it was done, according to my mother's testimony, I was playing in her room and in her plain view. That alone would not have been a very serious matter for me, because the injured child might have been herself responsible for her injury, but in a childish spirit of fear, afraid to say so, and, not realizing the enormity of the charge, have laid it at the door of any one of her playmates she saw fit. She stuck to her story, however, and there were many who believed that she spoke the truth and that my mother, in an endeavor to keep me out of trouble, had stated what was not true."

"But you were innocent, of course?" I said.

"I am sorry you think it necessary to ask that," he replied, his pallid face flushing with a not unnatural indignation; "and I decline to answer it," he added. "I have made a practice of late, when I am in trouble or in any way under suspicion, to let others do my pleading and prove my innocence. But you didn't mean to be like your friend Parton, I know, and I cannot be angry with a man who has done so much for me as you have—so let it pass. I was saying that standing alone the accusation of that young girl would not have been serious in its effects in view of my mother's testimony, had not a seeming corroboration come three days later, when another child was reported to have been pushed over an embankment and maimed for life by no less a person than my poor innocent self. This time I was again, on my mother's testimony, at her side; but there were witnesses of the crime, and they every one of them swore to my guilt, and as a consequence we found it advisable to leave the home that had been ours since my birth, and to come to England. My father had contemplated returning to his own country for some time, and the reputation that I had managed unwittingly to build up for myself in Calcutta was of a sort that

made it easier for him to make up his mind. He at first swore that he would ferret out the mystery in the matter, and would go through Calcutta with a drag-net if necessary to find the possible other boy who so resembled me that his outrageous acts were put upon my shoulders; but people had be-gun to make up their minds that there was not only something wrong about me, but that my mother knew it and had tried to get me out of my scrapes by lying—so there was nothing for us to do but leave.”

“And you never solved the mystery?” I queried.

“Well, not exactly,” returned Barker, gazing abstractedly before him. “Not exactly; but I have a theory, based upon the bitterest kind of experience, that I know what the trouble is.”

“You have a double?” I asked.

“You are a good guesser,” he replied; “and of all unhangd criminals he is the very worst.”

There was a strange smile on his lips as Carleton Barker said this. His tone was almost that of one who was boasting—in fact, so strongly was I impressed with his appearance of conceit when he estimated the character of his double, that I felt bold enough to say:

“You seem to be a little proud of it, in spite of all.”

Barker laughed.

“I can’t help it, though he has kept me on tenter-hooks for a lifetime,” he said. “We all feel a certain amount of pride in the success of those to whom we are related, either by family ties or other shackles like those with which I am bound to my murderous *alter ego*. I knew an Englishman once who was so impressed with the notion that he resembled the great Napoleon that he conceived the most ardent hatred for his own country for having sent the illustrious Frenchman to St. Helena. The same influence—a very subtle one—I feel. Here is a man who has maimed and robbed and murdered for years, and has never yet been apprehended. In his chosen calling he has been successful, and though I have been put to my trumps many a time to save my neck from the retribution that should have been his, I can’t help admiring the fellow, though I’d kill him if he stood before me!”

“And are you making any effort to find him?”

“I am, of course,” said Barker; “that has been my life-work. I am fortunately possessed of means enough to live on, so that I can devote all my time to unravelling the mystery. It is for this reason that I have acquainted myself with the element of London with which, as you have noticed, I am very familiar. The life these criminals are leading is quite as revolting to me as it is to you, and the scenes you and I have witnessed together are no more unpleasant to you than they are to me; but what can I do? The man lives and must be run down. He is in England, I am certain. This latest diversion of his has convinced me of that.”

“Well,” said I, rising, “you certainly have my sympathy, Mr. Barker, and I hope your efforts will meet with success. I trust you will have the pleasure of seeing the other gentleman hanged.”

“Thank you,” he said, with a queer look in his eyes, which, as I thought it over afterwards, did not seem to be quite as appropriate to his expression of gratitude as it might have been.

### III

When Barker and I parted that day it was for a longer period than either of us dreamed, for upon my arrival at my lodgings I found there a cable message from New York, calling me back to my labors. Three days later I sailed for home, and five years elapsed before I was so fortunate as to renew my acquaintance with foreign climes. Occasionally through these years Parton and I discussed Barker, and at no time did my companion show anything but an increased animosity towards our strange Keswick acquaintance. The mention of his name was sufficient to drive Parton from the height of exuberance to a state of abject depression.



"I shall not feel easy while that man lives," he said. "I think he is a minion of Satan. There is nothing earthly about him."

"Nonsense," said I. "Just because a man has a bad face is no reason for supposing him a villain or a supernatural creature."

"No," Parton answered; "but when a man's veins hold blood that saturates and leaves no stain, what are we to think?"

I confessed that this was a point beyond me, and, by mutual consent, we dropped the subject.

One night Parton came to my rooms white as a sheet, and so agitated that for a few minutes he could not speak. He dropped, shaking like a leaf, into my reading-chair and buried his face in his hands. His attitude was that of one frightened to the very core of his being. When I questioned him first he did not respond. He simply groaned. I resumed my reading for a few moments, and then looking up observed that Parton had recovered somewhat and was now gazing abstractedly into the fire.

"Well," I said, "feeling better?"

"Yes," he answered, slowly. "But it was a shock."

"What was?" I asked. "You've told me nothing as yet."

"I've seen Barker."

"No!" I cried. "Where?"

"In a back alley down-town, where I had to go on a hospital call. There was a row in a gambling-hell in Hester Street. Two men were cut and I had to go with the ambulance. Both men will probably die, and no one can find any trace of the murderer; but I know who he is. He was Carleton Barker and no one else. I passed him in the alley on the way in, and I saw him in the crowd when I came out."

"Was he alone in the alley?" I asked. Parton groaned again.

"That's the worst of it," said he. "He was not alone. He was with Carleton Barker."

"You speak in riddles," said I.

"I saw in riddles," said Parton; "for as truly as I sit here there were two of them, and they stood side by side as I passed through, alike as two peas, and crime written on the pallid face of each."

"Did Barker recognize you?"

"I think so, for as I passed he gasped—both of them gasped, and as I stopped to speak to the one I had first recognized he had vanished as completely as though he had never been, and as I turned to address the other he was shambling off into the darkness as fast as his legs could carry him."

I was stunned. Barker had been mysterious enough in London. In New York with his double, and again connected with an atrocity, he became even more so, and I began to feel somewhat towards him as had Parton from the first. The papers next morning were not very explicit on the subject of the Hester Street trouble, but they confirmed Parton's suspicions in his and my own mind as to whom the assassins were. The accounts published simply stated that the wounded men, one of whom had died in the night and the other of whom would doubtless not live through the day, had been set upon and stabbed by two unknown Englishmen who had charged them with cheating at cards; that the assailants had disappeared, and that the police had no clew as to their whereabouts.

Time passed and nothing further came to light concerning the Barkers, and gradually Parton and I came to forget them. The following summer I went abroad again, and then came the climax to the Barker episode, as we called it. I can best tell the story of that climax by printing here a letter written by myself to Parton. It was penned within an hour of the supreme moment, and

while it evidences my own mental perturbation in its lack of coherence, it is none the less an absolutely truthful account of what happened. The letter is as follows:

“LONDON, July 18, 18—.

“My Dear Parton,—You once said to me that you could not breathe easily while this world held Carleton Barker living. You may now draw an easy breath, and many of them, for the Barker episode is over. Barker is dead, and I flatter myself that I am doing very well myself to live sanely after the experiences of this morning.

“About a week after my arrival in England a horrible tragedy was enacted in the Seven Dials district. A woman was the victim, and a devil in human form the perpetrator of the crime. The poor creature was literally hacked to pieces in a manner suggesting the hand of Jack the Ripper, but in this instance the murderer, unlike Jack, was caught red-handed, and turned out to be no less a person than Carleton Barker. He was tried and convicted, and sentenced to be hanged at twelve o’clock to-day.

“When I heard of Barker’s trouble I went, as a matter of curiosity solely, to the trial, and discovered in the dock the man you and I had encountered at Keswick. That is to say, he resembled our friend in every possible respect. If he were not Barker he was the most perfect imitation of Barker conceivable. Not a feature of our Barker but was reproduced in this one, even to the name. But he failed to recognize me. He saw me, I know, because I felt his eyes upon me, but in trying to return his gaze I quailed utterly before him. I could not look him in the eye without a feeling of the most deadly horror, but I did see enough of him to note that he regarded me only as one of a thousand spectators who had flocked into the court-room during the progress of the trial. If it were our Barker who sat there his dissemblance was remarkable. So coldly did he look at me that I began to doubt if he really were the man we had met; but the events of this morning have changed my mind utterly on that point. He was the one we had met, and I am now convinced that his story to me of his double was purely fictitious, and that from beginning to end there has been but one Barker.

“The trial was a speedy one. There was nothing to be said in behalf of the prisoner, and within five days of his arraignment he was convicted and sentenced to the extreme penalty—that of hanging—and noon to-day was the hour appointed for the execution. I was to have gone to Richmond to-day by coach, but since Barker’s trial I have been in a measure depressed. I have grown to dislike the man as thoroughly as did you, and yet I was very much affected by the thought that he was finally to meet death upon the scaffold. I could not bring myself to participate in any pleasures on the day of his execution, and in consequence I gave up my Richmond journey and remained all morning in my lodgings trying to read. It was a miserable effort. I could not concentrate my mind upon my book—no book could have held the slightest part of my attention at that time. My thoughts were all for Carleton Barker, and I doubt if, when the clock hands pointed to half after eleven, Barker himself was more apprehensive over what was to come than I. I found myself holding my watch in my hand, gazing at the dial and counting the seconds which must intervene before the last dreadful scene of a life of crime. I would rise from my chair and pace my room nervously for a few minutes; then I would throw myself into my chair again and stare at my watch. This went on nearly all the morning—in fact, until ten minutes before twelve, when there came a slight knock at my door. I put aside my nervousness as well as I could, and, walking to the door, opened it.

“I wonder that I have nerve to write of it, Parton, but there upon the threshold, clad in the deepest black, his face pallid as the head of death itself and his hands shaking like those of a palsied man, stood no less a person than Carleton Barker!

“I staggered back in amazement and he followed me, closing the door and locking it behind him.

“ ‘What would you do?’ I cried, regarding his act with alarm, for, candidly, I was almost abject with fear.

“ ‘Nothing—to you!’ he said. ‘You have been as far as you could be my friend. The other, your companion of Keswick’—meaning you, of course—‘was my enemy.’

“ ‘I was glad you were not with us, my dear Parton. I should have trembled for your safety.

“ ‘How have you managed to escape?’ I asked.

“ ‘I have not escaped,’ returned Barker. ‘But I soon shall be free from my accursed double.’

“ ‘Here he gave an unearthly laugh and pointed to the clock.

“ ‘Ha, ha!’ he cried. ‘Five minutes more—five minutes more and I shall be free.’

“ ‘Then the man in the dock was not you?’ I asked.

“ ‘The man in the dock,’ he answered, slowly, ‘is even now mounting the gallows, whilst I stand here.’

“ ‘He trembled a little as he spoke, and lurched forward like a drunken man; but he soon recovered himself, grasping the back of my chair convulsively with his long white fingers.

“ ‘In two minutes more,’ he whispered, ‘the rope will be adjusted about his neck; the black cap is even now being drawn over his cursed features, and—’

“ ‘Here he shrieked with laughter, and, rushing to the window, thrust his head out and literally sucked the air into his lungs, as a man with a parched throat would have drunk water. Then he turned and, tottering back to my side, hoarsely demanded some brandy.

“ ‘It was fortunately at hand, and precisely as the big bells in Westminster began to sound the hour of noon, he caught up the goblet and held it aloft.

“ ‘To him!’ he cried.

“ ‘And then, Parton, standing before me in my lodgings, as truly as I write, he remained fixed and rigid until the twelfth stroke of the bells sounded, when he literally faded from my sight, and the goblet, falling to the floor, was shattered into countless atoms!’”