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REGGIE IN TROUBLE—See Inside.

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

THE MYSTERY OF GABLE FARM!

A Grand, Long Complete Detective Story introducing Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Ferrers Locke, the Up-to-Date Detective with New Methods.

Murder!

IT was by sheer chance that Ferrers Locke, the famous Baker Street detective, came to be engaged upon the case of the Gable Farm.

The famous detective and his boy assistant—Jack Drake—had left London by car for a week's tour in the Eastern counties, by way of rest and change. And because night was falling and the lighted windows of the Red Lion at Midway, glimmering into the winter dusk, looked cosy and comfortable, Locke had decided to stop for the night at Midway. There was no garage at the Red Lion, but a large shed accommodated the car, and Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake found the quiet little inn a comfortable, if homely, resting-place.

In the bar was displayed a large bill, printed in red and blue, announcing that Steggles' World-Famous Circus was stopping at Midway for three days only, with performances every afternoon and evening. Jack Drake read that announcement with some interest. Ferrers Locke noted it and smiled. His boy assistant was still a good deal of a schoolboy in many ways, and his look showed that he had not lost his interest in circus performances.

"You would like to see the show, Drake?" Locke asked.

"Well, if we're stopping here——" said Drake diffidently. "There's a performance this evening!"

Locke glanced at the bill very gravely.

"'Steggles' World-Famous Circus and Marvellous Menagerie!'" he read out. "'Lions, tigers, and savage baboons from the heart of darkest Africa!' Quite worth seeing, my boy!"

Drake coloured and laughed.

"I suppose you wouldn't care for it, Mr. Locke?"

"Well, I think I will smoke a quiet pipe after supper here," said Ferrers Locke. "But you shall go to the circus, my boy, and tell me all about it afterwards!"

"Right-o!" said Drake brightly.

And, after an early supper, Jack Drake buttoned up his coat against the keen winter wind, and started for Midway Common, where the circus tent was pitched.

Ferrers Locke stretched himself in a comfortable chair before a glowing fire and lighted his pipe.

It was Ferrers Locke's way when he was taking one of his brief spells of rest from strenuous work, to dismiss business entirely from his mind. He smoked in the little quiet parlour, and glanced at the local paper with cheerful contentment, glad of the quiet and rest. Certainly, in that slumbrous corner of Essex he did not expect anything of an exciting nature to transpire. The inn seemed almost deserted—probably the rare visit of a circus was a powerful counter-attraction for the natives. The fat and florid landlord drifted into the parlour to chat with his guest, and Locke laid down the "Midway Times." From his host, he learned all the latest news of Midway—the visit of the circus; the dispute at market between Farmer Stubbs of Gable Farm and Mr. Tippett, the dealer in pigs; the accident to George Giles' waggon in the snow-drift, and last, but not least, the installation of the telephone at the Red Lion—which was a great event. The landlord was still chatting, amiably and interminably, when there was a shout from the bar.

"Jim Rudd! Jim Rudd!"

"That's me," said the innkeeper. He jumped, as the door from the bar was flung violently open, and a man, hatless and breathless, rushed in. "Why, what—what —— You've forgot your manners, Dick Hanson!"

The man who had rushed in stood breathless, palpitating, evidently in a state of wild terror and alarm. He clutched the corner of the table to support himself.

"It—it's murder!" he stammered.

"What?"

"Farmer Stubbs——"

"Anything happened to Mr. Stubbs?"

The man gasped spasmodically.

"Dead—murdered—in his room!" he articulated. "I—I come here to—to telephone for the police! Dead—murdered—Mr. Stubbs!"

"Good heavens!"

The innkeeper's florid face was white now. Ferrers Locke rose to his feet.

Even to that quiet and placid corner of the kingdom crime had come—crime in its most terrible and tragic form!

"The police!" muttered Dick Hanson. "You telephone for them, Mr. Rudd—I dunno how to work the contraption!"

"Good heavens!" repeated Mr. Rudd helplessly. "Farmer Stubbs murdered! You're dreaming, man!"

"I tell you I saw him in his room—choked to death!" gasped Hanson. "Lying on the floor——"

"Only this afternoon I saw him, driving home in the trap!" said Mr. Rudd incredulously. "You've been drinking, Dick Hanson!"

"Send for the police, I tell you," gasped the man, sinking exhausted into a chair. "I've run all the way from the Gable Farm."

"Calm yourself, my man," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "Tell me what has happened. I am a detective from London."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Hanson, passing his hand over his eyes. "It has fair knocked me over, sir—and only this morning, sir, I had a row with him, and he gave me notice."

"You was always rowing with him, Dick Hanson," said Mr. Rudd. "I 'ope you haven't been and gone and done nothing rash."

"So help me, I wouldn't have touched him, though he was a hard man," said Dick Hanson. "I was setting in the kitchen when I heard a row going on in his room. I took no notice at first, thinking that p'r'aps he was throwing things about, like he would sometimes in a tantrum. Then I heard him cry out 'Help! Help!'" He shuddered. "Oh, sir, his voice was something dreadful! I rushed up the stairs at that, and they was still struggling in his room, but the door was locked. I could hear the other man's voice kind of growling in a savage way. I banged on the door, and then I got a stool and smashed in the lock. It was over then. The candle was burning on the table, and there was Mr. Stubbs lying on the floor—dead as a doornail, sir—his eyes starting out of his head! The window was wide open. He had a stick in his hand, and he was dead—dead ——"

The man's voice broke off in a quaver.

"The police must be informed at once," said Ferrers Locke. "Is there a police-station in Midway?"

"Bless you, no, sir!" said the innkeeper. "There ain't any nearer than Uttley, and that's two mile. But there's the telephone——"

"You had better ring them up at once."

"Certainly, sir."

The innkeeper went to the telephone. Dick Hanson sat breathing hard, with chattering teeth.

"They'll say I did it," he muttered helplessly. "We was always having trouble, and he gave me notice this morning. We was alone in the house, sir. But I swear I never touched him."

The landlord came back from the telephone.

"They're sending over an inspector and a constable in a trap," he said. "They say nothing's to be touched till Inspector Gibson comes. They'll be at Gable Farm in half an hour or so."

"In the meantime, something may be done," said Ferrers Locke. "Mr. Hanson, will you show me to the way to Gable Farm?"

The man shuddered.

"I daren't go back, sir—not for worlds ——"

"Come, come!" said Ferrers Locke. "You must pull yourself together. Not a moment must be lost. I have told you that I am a detective, and I wish to see what has happened at once. Give him something to drink, Mr. Rudd, and we will start at once."

There was a quiet command in Ferrers Locke's manner and voice that was not to be denied. The innkeeper brought the shivering man a stiff drink, and then ordered the trap for Ferrers Locke. Then he took the detective aside and whispered:

"You're going to Gable Farm alone with him, sir?"

"Yes."

"'Tain't safe for you, sir, if I may make so bold. If Farmer Stubbs have been murdered, it looks—it looks—— You catch on, sir? He was a hard man, was Mr. Stubbs, and very hard on Dick. And it looks——"

"I think I shall be quite safe with Mr Hanson," said Ferrers Locke.

"Well, you know your own business best, sir," said the innkeeper. "But I wouldn't trust myself with him this dark night, arter what's happened!"

"That is all right," said Locke reassuringly. "Now, are you ready, my man?"

"Yes, sir," said Hanson feebly.

And, in a few minutes more, Ferrers Locke was driving the trap through the winter darkness, with Dick Hanson sitting by his side, directing him on the way.

A Strange Mystery.

GABLE FARM stood a mile out of Midway, back from a narrow rutty lane. As Ferrers Locke drove up he observed that two windows of the farmhouse were lighted—the kitchen window at the side, and a bedroom window above. The bedroom light evidently came from a candle, which was guttering and flickering in the wind from an open window. Strange lights and shadows danced in the room as the candle-flame wavered in the wind.

Hanson, who seemed to have pulled himself together a little by this time, jumped down and opened the farm gate.

Locke drove the trap up to the house and alighted.

The front door was wide open, as it had evidently been left when Hanson rushed out to speed to the village with the terrible news.

"You—you're going in, sir?" stammered Hanson.

"Certainly," said Locke. "Come with me."

He turned on the light of his electric lamp and entered. The man shuddered and followed him.

Gable Farm was a small building. On the ground floor there was only a large bricked kitchen and a living-room and narrow hall. A rickety staircase led to the next floor, where the two rooms were evidently used for storing produce. Above was a third floor, approached by a still narrower staircase, and containing two little bedrooms.

One bedroom door was wide open, and the candle-light flickered upon a small landing.

Dick Hanson was following the detective slowly up the stairs, but he stopped on the second staircase.

"You don't want me up there, sir?" he muttered.

"No!" said Locke. "Is there anyone else in the house, Hanson?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Did Mr. Stubbs live here alone?"

"Only with me, sir. That there other room is mine."

"He was a bachelor, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and as cross-grained a bachelor as you'd find anywhere in Essex—Heaven forgive me for saying so now!" muttered Hanson. "But he was a hard man, sir. He would kick his dog as soon as look at it—and he'd have laid his stick about me, many a time, if he'd dared."

"You were in the kitchen when you heard the sound of a struggle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the front door fastened?"

"Locked and bolted, sir. The house was shut up for the night."

"And Mr. Stubbs' bedroom door was locked on the inside?"

"Yes, sir—you see where I had to smash it in."

"I see!" said Ferrers Locke quietly. "You had better go down to the kitchen, Hanson, and wait there until the police arrive."

"Very well, sir."

The man clumped heavily down the stairs. Ferrers Locke glanced down the staircase after the rather heavy, lumbering figure as it disappeared. The thought was in his mind that Dick Hanson was in as extreme a danger as a man could well be, and that when the official police arrived, their first proceeding would be to take the labourer into custody. The man seemed to realise, in a dull way, that suspicion was certain to fall upon him, and to be numbed by the possibility. Locke heard him tramp heavily into the kitchen, and heard the creak of a chair as the man sank into it, helplessly, almost like a sack of wheat falling.

Was it by his hand that the farmer had met his death? Locke's mind was open on the subject so far; but it was clear that the outlook was black enough for Dick Hanson.

Ferrers Locke went on into the farmer's bedroom.

Unconnected, officially, with the police as he was, Locke had, strictly speaking, no right to engage in the affair; but he did not hesitate. He was accustomed to working with the officials of Scotland Yard, where his services were always welcome, and he did not think it likely that they would be rejected by the police of a remote hamlet. But, in any case, he would not have hesitated. His interest was awakened in the case itself, and in the peril in which the labouring man stood. Innocent or guilty, Hanson was very unlikely to be able to help himself. If he was innocent, he needed all the help that Ferrers Locke's keen brain could give him—and all the more because he was a poor and uneducated man, Locke felt it his duty to do his best for him. The view the police would take was a foregone conclusion, to Locke's mind, and it was for the Baker Street detective to ascertain whether any other view could possibly be taken.

The sight that met his eyes in the bedroom was terrible enough.

On the uncarpeted floor lay a man of about fifty, of burly frame, dressed roughly in farming clothes. One of his gaiters was removed, and the other unbuckled, as if he had been preparing to undress for bed when the sudden attack came.

He was quite dead.

The hairy, bronzed face was terrible in expression, and blackened by suffocation. The head was forced back, and on the muscular throat were the marks of a savage and cruel grip.

In the farmer's hand was still grasped a heavy stick, with which undoubtedly he had sought to defend himself.

His left hand was tightly clenched—"rigor mortis" had long set in.

The sight was terrible—but Locke was accustomed to terrible sights. Without the quiver of a muscle, he approached the dead man, and made a quiet examination without moving the body, however.

Then he looked about the room.

The window was open—it was a little casement window, and one side was fixed and immovable; the other side flapping open in the wind. The open half of the window was not more than a foot wide.

On Hanson's statement that the door had been locked on the inside, the murderer must have entered by the window.

Locke shook his head.

The man who had strangled so burly a man as Farmer Stubbs could not have been a diminutive man. And a large man certainly could not have forced himself in through that narrow space.

Locke flashed his electric lamp out of the window and scanned the wall below.

The window was between thirty and forty feet from the ground, and the gutter pipe ran within easy reach of it.

But the rusty old iron pipe, fastened to the wall by old and rusty iron clamps, could not have borne the weight of a climber. Any man, trusting his weight to it, would have dragged it headlong from the wall.

There were straggling tendrils of ivy up the pipe, but they would not have borne a cat climbing upwards. The ivy was torn loose in one or two places, but that was probably caused by the hard winter wind, which was howling round Gable Farm.

Locke returned to the dead farmer.

He examined the clenched left hand, and ascertained that several reddish hairs were clutched in the frozen fingers. Dick Hanson had reddish hair and beard.

There was a sound of wheels below, and a loud voice was heard. Ferrers Locke heard Hanson tramp out of the kitchen, and there was a muttering of voices below.

Then came heavy, rigid footsteps on the stairs, and a police-inspector, with a red and angry face, strode into the dead man's room. He stared at Locke.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he demanded.

His manner was unpleasant in the extreme.

Locke looked at him coolly.

"I might address those questions to you," he answered mildly.

"I am Inspector Gibson of Uttley," rapped out the newcomer sternly. "I find you here in the presence of the murdered man."

"Has not Hanson told you——"

"That a gentleman staying at the Red Lion in Midway came back with him—yes! I should like to know your motive, sir, for meddling in this room."

The inspector glared at Locke, with strong suspicion in his face.

Locke smiled slightly.

"I am a detective by profession," he answered. "You may possibly have heard my name—Ferrers Locke."

Inspector Gibson started a little.

"*Of* Baker Street?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have certainly heard your name, sir! But you have no right whatever to interfere here, and I refuse to allow you to do so."

The Baker Street detective shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that Inspector Gibson felt his importance diminished and insulted by the uncalled-for interference of this stranger in the district—celebrated man as he was in his own profession.

"That is as you choose, sir," said Locke quietly. "My assistance has often been requested by the official police."

"It is not wanted here."

"Very good. Perhaps you would care to carry out the idea that was in your mind when you entered this room, and arrest me on suspicion of being concerned in the crime!" said Ferrers Locke sarcastically.

"I shall not dandy words with you, Mr. Locke," said the inspector. "Wilson!"

"Sir!" came the constable's voice from below.

"Come up here, and bring Hanson."

"Yes, sir!"

Ferrers Locke stepped back. Inspector Gibson took no further heed of him, but he did not proceed to the length of ordering the celebrated detective from the room. The constable came heavily up the creaking stairs with Hanson.

No Assistance Required.

INSPECTOR GIBSON looked about the room and looked at the dead man stretched on the floor, and made notes. Then he turned to the shrinking figure of Dick Hanson, standing in the doorway with the constable's hand on his arm. The constable was evidently prepared to stop the man if he attempted to escape.

But Hanson was plainly not thinking of that. Innocent or guilty, he was too overcome with horror and dismay to make any effort for himself. He looked a simple, kindly man—probably a very capable man in his own useful calling, but utterly unable to deal with such an emergency as this. His eyes wandered almost pathetically from the police-inspector's sharp, suspicious face to Ferrers Locke, as if he realised instinctively that in his helplessness, he had a friend in the Baker Street detective.

"Your name is Hanson, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the man.

"I've heard of Farmer Stubbs—met him, in fact," said the inspector. "He lived here alone with his man. You have been in his employ some time?"

"Three months, sir."

"On what terms—friendly or otherwise?" Ferrers Locke interposed.

"You have forgotten something, have you not, inspector?" he asked.

The inspector glared at him, resenting the interruption, but he did not fail to take the hint.

"Hanson, it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"Oh, sir!" faltered Hanson.

"Now you may answer me or not as you choose."

"I will tell you everything I can, sir."

"Were you on friendly terms with your master?"

"Not very, sir. He rowed me this morning, and gave me notice. I—I was going on Saturday."

"When did he go to his room?"

"At eight o'clock, sir. He was always early to bed, except when he was out drinking at the inns."

"He left you in the kitchen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you been quarrelling?"

"He was cursing me a little, sir—he often did. I never said nothing back, sir. I was that tired with my day's work."

"He locked himself in?"

"He always did, sir."

"And then——"

"It was very soon after he went up, sir, that I heard a struggle. But he had been drinking this afternoon, and it always told on his temper. I thought p'r'aps he was kicking the furniture about—till he called for help in a dreadful voice, sir—choking like."

"What did you do then?"

"I came up, sir, and as the door was locked, I bashed it with the stool, and broke open the lock."

"Who was in the room then?"

"Only—only him, sir."

The man shuddered.

"You saw no one else?"

"Nobody, sir."

"And how do you suppose the murderer got away, Hanson?" asked the inspector, with sharp sarcasm.

"Out of the window, I suppose, sir."

"A window a foot wide—I see that the other half doesn't open." Mr. Gibson

flashed his light out of the window, and then turned back. "A jump of thirty feet and more. That pipe wouldn't bear a boy, let alone a man. Be careful of what you say, Hanson!"

"I don't know how he got away, sir," said the man, bewildered. "I know nobody was 'ere when I got in at the door."

"What did you do after that?"

"I—I was that scared, sir, I ran down into the kitchen shouting for help. Then I remembered there wasn't nobody to hear, so I ran out, and ran all the way to the Red Lion, to ask Mr. Rudd to telephone for the police, sir."

"Then you returned with this gentleman?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have no desire to make a confession?"

"I haven't nothing to confess, sir—I've told the whole truth, and—and I think that gentleman believes me, sir," said the man, with a gesture towards Ferrers Locke.

The inspector frowned.

"Never mind that gentleman," he said drily. "Wilson, take the man downstairs, and see that you keep him safe. Hanson, it is my duty to take you into custody."

"I can't help it, sir, if you do," muttered Hanson. "But I swear I never touched him."

"That will do. Take him away, Wilson."

The constable led Hanson away down the creaking stairs. Inspector Gibson glanced at Ferrers Locke, with a slightly sneering smile.

"The doctor will be here soon," he said. "But the cause of death is plain enough. I have heard a good deal of you, Mr. Locke, and your rather peculiar methods. But I suppose you look on this as a clear case?"

It was evident that the inspector, in spite of his hostility, was rather keen to hear the famous detective's opinion.

Locke shook his head.

"Far from clear, I should say," he answered.

"Come, Mr. Locke," said the inspector, in a bantering tone. "Is there really room here for fine-spun theories? Hanson was on bad terms with his master, who had sacked him only this morning. He followed Mr. Stubbs up to his room, smashed in the door, and attacked him. The unfortunate man seized a stick to defend himself, but Hanson strangled him. Then he ran to the Red Lion to give the alarm, thinking, of course, that that would help to avert suspicion from himself. What?"

"Possibly!" said Locke.

"You fancy that some man climbed a thirty-foot blank wall, with the help of a rotten pipe that would not support the weight of a boy, and climbed in at a window a foot wide?"

"That is scarcely possible, inspector."

"On Hanson's own showing, the door was locked on the inside, and had to be smashed open. The murderer, therefore, did not enter by the door."

"True."

"Well, then, Mr. Locke——"

"Might not the murderer have been in the room already when the farmer came up to bed?" suggested Locke mildly.

"It—it is possible, of course. But then, his escape—— A man could not leave by the window, if he could not enter by it."

"Quite correct, inspector."

"Then the case is clear enough," said Inspector Gibson, with some irritation. "I shall certainly arrest Hanson on suspicion, and I have no doubt whatever that he will hang for the crime. There never was more palpable guilt, in my opinion." He bent over the dead man. "He must have clutched at Hanson's hair or beard in the struggle—he has some of the hairs clutched in his fingers now. Could anything be clearer?"

"I think so. He has a stick in his other hand, and he is a powerful man. Why did he catch up the stick?"

The inspector stared.

"To defend himself against the murderer, of course."

"Quite so," assented Ferrers Locke. "And he is a powerful man, and must have put up a struggle. He was not choked to death in a few seconds. Yet apparently he had no chance to get in a single blow with the stick! Hanson shows no sign of having received a blow."

The inspector started slightly.

"His wrist may have been held!" he said slowly.

"He is quite as powerful a man as Hanson, if not more so. Could Hanson hold his wrists with one hand, and choke him with the other?"

"He must have done so. The hair clutched in his hand is conclusive proof against Hanson."

"You believe so?"

"It is plain enough."

"My opinion differs a little," said Ferrers Locke. "I regard the hair clutched in Mr. Stubbs' hand as conclusive proof of Hanson's innocence."

Inspector Gibson stared at the man from Baker Street.

"This is not a subject for joking," he said stiffly.

"I should not be likely to jest, in such a place, and on such a subject. I am speaking seriously."

"Then how do you make out that Hanson's hair, torn from him in the death-struggle, is no evidence against Hanson?"

"Simply because it is not Hanson's hair."

"It is the same colour——"

"Practically, yes. But it is not Hanson's hair."

"Then what is it?" demanded the puzzled inspector.

"That is what we have to ascertain," said Ferrers Locke calmly. "But if you care to hear one little detail, I know that it is not Hanson's hair, because by no stretch of possibility could it have grown upon Hanson."

"And why not, sir?"

"Because it is not human hair!" answered Ferrers Locke.

The Guilty Hand.

FERRERS LOCKE spoke quietly, but the effect of his words on Inspector Gibson of Uttley was electric. The inspector started, stared, and then burst into an angry laugh.

"So that is it, is it?" he exclaimed. "I have heard of your wonderful theorising, Mr. Locke! But, by gad, I never expected to hear a cock-and-bull story like this! Not human hair!"

"No!" said the Baker Street detective tranquilly.

"We shall hear what the doctor says when he arrives."

"It is quite possible that a country practitioner may fail to distinguish the difference," answered Ferrers Locke. "In fact, Mr. Gibson, I think it very probable that, but for the happy chance of my presence here, you would have succeeded in hanging a very worthy and useful member of the community for a crime he never dreamed of committing. I leave you to your task, Mr. Gibson. You have refused my assistance—and I shall not offer it again. Good-evening, sir!"

"May I ask, sir, whether it is your intention to meddle further with this matter?" asked the inspector, breathing hard.

"Undoubtedly."

"I shall not permit it, sir!" thundered the inspector.

"You scarcely have authority to forbid my next step in the affair, Mr. Gibson!"

"And what is that, pray?"

"I am going to the circus."

"The—the circus?"

"Yes. You may have heard that Steggles' World-Famous Circus is giving performances on Midway Common!" said the Baker Street detective blandly. "I am going there! Have you any objection to offer?"

"None, sir," sneered the inspector. "So long as you do not ask me to accompany you?"

"I should certainly have asked you to accompany me, if you had received my presence here in a more courteous manner," said Ferrers Locke. "As it is, I bid you a very good-evening!"

And the Baker Street detective quitted the room, leaving the Uttley inspector staring after him blankly.

Locke descended the staircase and went to the door, where his trap waited. He turned back, however, and looked into the kitchen. Hanson was sitting before the fire, hunched up in a chair, the picture of misery and despair. The constable was seated between the arrested man and the door, very much on his guard. Locke nodded to the constable and called across to the labourer.

"Hanson, my man!"

Dick Hanson looked up hopelessly.

"Take courage," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "I have proof that satisfies me of your innocence. I am now going to work in your behalf. You may spend the night in a cell, my poor fellow, but I guarantee that you will be released and cleared of suspicion very soon."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Hanson.

"You may rely upon me," said Ferrers Locke.

Unheeding the blank astonished stare of the constable, Ferrers Locke left the little farmhouse, mounted into his trap and drove away.

He drove directly back to the Red Lion. Mr. Rudd met him at the door as he stepped from the trap, with an anxious face.

"Is it true, sir?" he asked. "Mr. Stubbs has really been murdered?"

"Yes, Mr. Rudd."

"And was it Dick Hanson?"

"The police appear to think so. But it was no more Dick Hanson than it was you or I, Mr. Rudd. Has my young friend returned?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the parlour waiting for you."

Ferrers Locke passed into the inn parlour. Jack Drake was waiting for him there, toasting his toes before the cheery fire. He jumped up as Locke entered.

"You've found something to do, sir, even in this quiet place!" he said. "Mr. Rudd has told me about the murder at Gable Farm."

"Yes, Drake. Did you like the circus?"

"Very much, sir."

"Was one of the items cut out of the programme?"

Drake looked curiously at his chief.

"I'm blessed if I know how you guess that, sir."

"It was not a guess, Drake."

"Well, how do you know, then, sir," said Drake. "One of the items was left out—rather an interesting one, too."

Locke glanced at a circus handbill lying on the table.

"The Great Hairy African Baboon!" he read out. "Was that the item cut out of the programme, Drake?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Are you tired, my boy, or would you like to walk with me, and show me the way to the circus?"

"The show's over, sir, of course."

"There he is, sir," said the circus-master. Two savage and ferocious eyes blinked through the bars of the cage at Ferrers Locke and his assistant. The baboon shook the bars with the hairy hands that, a few hours before, had choked the life out of a man. Ferrers Locke gazed at the great ape. His brain was working.

"There will be an epilogue this evening," said Ferrers Locke.

"I'll get my coat at once, sir. It's only a few minutes walk."

The Baker Street detective and his boy assistant left the Red Lion together, and walked down the dark lane that led to Midway Common.

The crowd had long cleared off, but lights were glimmering at the circus encampment. Shadowy figures moved to and fro; caravans were being packed, horses harnessed; the great tent was already struck. Jack Drake looked round at the busy scene, lighted by flaring naptha lamps, in surprise.

"They're going!" he exclaimed.

"But not gone," said Ferrers Locke. "I thought we had ample time to catch them."

"It's jolly odd, sir! The circus is advertised to stay here for three days, and this is only the second evening. There'll be a lot of people disappointed to find it gone to-morrow. I wonder why they're shifting? They had a full house this evening, and good business, I should say."

"Mr. Steggles no doubt has his reasons," said Ferrers Locke drily. He called to one of the circus hands. "Where is Mr. Steggles? I have important business with him."

The man looked up from dragging at a tent-peg.

"In his van, sir, yonder—the blue van."

"Thank you!"

Locke and Jack Drake approached the blue caravan, and the detective knocked at the door. It was opened by a fat man in evening clothes, whose florid face was pale and troubled. He stared at the visitors with grim and extremely unwelcoming looks.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "We're busy here."

"No doubt," said Ferrers Locke. "You are striking camp very suddenly, Mr. Steggles?"

"That's my business!"

"And mine!" said the Baker Street detective. "I have to ask you to countermand your orders and remain here."

The circus-master stared.

"Drunk?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"Well, clear off! I've no time for fooling," snapped Mr. Steggles angrily.

"Neither have I," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "Has your African baboon returned, or been recaptured, Mr. Steggles?"

"He came back——" Mr. Steggles broke off abruptly. "Confound you, what do you mean? How do you know——" He stared at Ferrers Locke. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I want your evidence to save a man's life, Mr. Steggles," answered Ferrers Locke.

The circus-master shivered.

"What has he done?" he asked, in a low, trembling voice. "What has the brute done? I knowed he'd been up to something, when he sneaked back to his cage. He was covered with bruises, and—and—— Good heavens, sir, what has he done?"

"He has killed a man," said Ferrers Locke, "and an innocent man is under arrest on suspicion of the crime. Your evidence will save his life, Mr. Steggles. Where is the ape now?"

"Good heavens! In his cage now, sir! He got away early this evening—that fool Jadson left the door unfastened."

"Take me to him!"

The circus-master made no demur now. He descended the steps of the caravan, with a lamp in his hand and led the way, and Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake followed him.

All Clear.

"THERE he is, sir!"

Jack Drake shuddered as he looked through the bars of the cage.

Two savage and ferocious eyes blinked at them in the light. In the cage was a great baboon of unusual size, with wiry, reddish-brown hair. That the animal was naturally savage was evident at a glance. The hideous animal was in a more savage and restless mood than usual, however—a fact accounted for by the injuries it had received. On the sinuous hairy body, on the hideous head, were bruises where heavy blows had fallen. The ape blinked and gibbered at the three faces that looked through the bars.

"He got away, sir," mumbled the showman. "Once afore he got away and there was no end of trouble about it—he killed a dog, and I had to pay. He's all right if he's let alone. But——" He broke off. "How did you know, sir?"

Locke gazed at the great ape without replying.

The baboon clutched the bars of the cage and shook them with the hairy hands that, a few hours before, had choked the life out of a man.

It was easy for Locke to reconstruct what must have happened.

The ape had escaped from his cage and wandered into the fields. Possibly, with the idea of finding a hiding-place, it had climbed into the open window at Gable Farm.

The climb, impossible for a man, had been easy enough for the monkey. Either before Mr. Stubbs had gone to his room, or while he was sitting on the bed unbuckling his gaiters, the great ape had climbed in at the open window.

And then——

Probably the animal would have fled without doing harm, but the harsh nature of the dead man had been his undoing. He had taken up the stick to thrash the ape out of the window.

Then the ferocious nature of the African savage had been awakened, and he had fastened on the farmer.

Doubtless, the hapless man had rained blows on the brute, but he could not unloosen the fearful grip that had fastened on his throat.

That grip had choked him to death, and then, no doubt, that crashing of Hanson at the door had frightened the ape from his victim, and he had fled by the window, as he had entered.

There was no consciousness of crime in the ape's brain; but his instinct warned him that he had done what would be followed by severe punishment. He had fled from the farmhouse and skulked back to his cage at the circus, to find refuge there.

"How did you know, sir?" repeated the showman.

Ferrers Locke turned from the cage.

"The man was killed in a room into which a human being could not have climbed," he said. "The door was locked. In his clenched hand he held a tuft of hair—not hair from a human head. The only man in the place, the only man who could have committed the murder, had no trace of a blow, yet the dead man had a heavy stick in his hand, which he had evidently used in his death-struggle. I knew that there was a menagerie in the neighbourhood, and it was not difficult to deduce that some ferocious animal had escaped and was responsible for the deed."

"The police know——"

"Not yet," said Ferrers Locke. "The police have arrested Mr. Stubbs' labourer, and your evidence, Mr. Steggles, is going to save his life. And—you were going away?"

The circus-master shifted uneasily.

"I was fair knocked over," he said. "We had to cut the Great Hairy Baboon out of the programme, as he had got away. And you can imagine my feelings, sir, knowing what a savage brute he was, and thinking of the harm he might do. And—and then he came sneaking back, and sneaked into his cage. I knowed his looks. I knowed he'd been up to something wicked, the brute. He looked jest as he looked when he bit the keeper last time. And—and I could see there'd been a fight—he was covered with bruises—so—so I reckoned I'd better clear out of the neighbourhood afore the trouble came home to roost, sir."

He hesitated.

"If I'd known how bad it was, sir, and that—that a man was in danger from what he'd done, I wouldn't have thought of going."

"I hope not," said Ferrers Locke drily. "But now, Mr. Steggles, you had better order your men to re-camp, as your evidence is wanted at once. I will bring round my car to take you and the ape to Uttley."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Steggles submissively. "I'm willing to do anything I can. Heaven knows I'm sorry for what's happened—but mixing up with the police ain't good for a showman, sir. That was why I reckoned I'd clear. But it's all right, I'll come—and arter this, sir, I'm going to have that brute shot! He's more trouble than he's worth!"

Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake returned to the inn.

Ten minutes later, Locke drove out the car, first sending Drake to bed. In the Baker Street detective's car, Mr. Steggles, and the giant baboon in the cage, were driven across to Uttley police-station, where Inspector Gibson had arrived with his prisoner.

The inspector's report for the coroner's inquest was nearly written out. After Ferrers Locke's visit, Inspector Gibson, with a wry face, tore up his report and dropped it into the fire. It was necessary for him to write out quite a fresh report.

* * * * *

Ferrers Locke had intended to pass only the night at the Red Lion at Midway. But he was, of course, detained for the inquest—where he was very warmly commended and congratulated by the coroner for his handling of the mysterious case. Dick Hanson had already been released; but on the subject of his brief detention, the coroner made a few remarks which were very uncomfortable hearing to Inspector Gibson. Hanson gave his evidence at the inquest, and when the proceedings were over, a crowd of rural friends escorted the once-suspected man to the Red Lion, to testify their sympathy and congratulation in Mr. Rudd's bar. Inspector Gibson's view of the strange termination of the affair Ferrers Locke did not know, and did not want to know.

When the famous detective and his boy assistant entered the car to resume their tour, Dick Hanson came shyly up.

"You've saved my life, Mr. Locke, sir," he said, "and my good name, too. I've got another job now, with the squire at Uttley, and—and the wages is good, sir. I 'ear you are a great detective, sir, up in Lunnon, and—and I'd be glad to pay anything, sir, in the way of a fee——"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Nothing of the kind," he said. "I am only too glad that I was here, and able to help you, my friend. Good-bye!"

And Ferrers Locke shook hands with honest Dick, and the car rolled away.

"I'm jolly glad we stopped for the night at the Red Lion, sir," said Jack Drake.

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"It was a fortunate chance," he said. "I fear that Inspector Gibson is a little disappointed—but we have saved a man's life in solving the mystery of the Gable Farm."

THE END.

Another fine long story of Ferrers Locke in next Tuesday's "Boys' Herald." Make sure of your copy by ordering EARLY.

: Editorial :

My dear Chums,—Our great new serial is a success, there is no doubt about that. Nibby Clink has a good many troubles to come. That he meets them with rare sporting spirit goes without saying. The plucky little youngster generally wins on points. He has had to be quick and as lively as an eel all his life, and Stringer's young chum will prove his metal even more. What is more, the London boy manages to be jolly under the most difficult conditions. "The College of Sportsmen" is outstanding. I am glad to know that it has been so well received by all my readers. Poulter is real enough. Unfortunately, the bully type does exist, and he glories in his contemptible tyranny until the day of reckoning comes along, when it ceases to be fine weather for him, to use the words of young Clink.

All the characters and places mentioned in Walter Edwards' great story are, of course, fictitious. The author has just described a bit of Sussex as he knows it, and his group of fellows stand to win even more popularity than was the case with the various champions of Nortchester United in the celebrated Stringer series of tales.

Keep your eye on Ferrers Locke and Drake, his clever young assistant. The author is putting his best work into these stories. Like a great doctor, the famous detective can never call his time his own. A startling fresh "case" may come along at any minute. Personally, I think the life would be a bit on the jumpy side, as one would never know what was going to happen next. The ting-ting! of the 'phone-bell would usually mean that there was new trouble afoot, and that somebody at the other end of the wire was waiting to be pulled out of an awkward situation.

There is no need for me to emphasise the value of the Traveller's Notebook. This bright little feature is proving mighty interesting, and the Traveller does somehow contrive to wedge in plenty of the soundest information into his taking paragraphs.

There are some splendid surprises coming along in your favourite paper, and I want you to keep your eye on the "Boys' Herald" during the coming year. Next week there will be another magnificent number, and you must not miss it whatever you do.

YOUR EDITOR.