

DETECTIVES IN STOPPERED BOTTLES.

Crimes That Are Unravelled in the Laboratory.

It is a little unjust, said a well-known medical expert in crime, that nearly all the popular credit for unraveling the mysteries of crime should go to the detectives, when one considers that their best work is really child's play compared with the miracles of detective work done in the laboratory.

In fact, I have no hesitation in saying that scores of the most mysterious murder-cases would remain unsolved to this day if it had not been for the skill of the medical analyst; and, on the other hand, many a suspected man would have been wrongly sent to his death.

There is no work more difficult and delicate than this detective work of the laboratory; but laborious and intricate as it is, it is remorseless in the certainty with which it brings home guilt to a criminal.

Let us suppose, for instance, that the principal evidence against a man suspected of murder is a single dark stain on his clothing. All the detectives in the world could not say whether this is a stain of blood, of paint, jam, cochineal, or, in fact, anything else that would leave a mark; or, assuming that it is blood, whether it is the blood of a human being or an animal.

But this tiny stain is all the medical wants. His first step is to dissolve it in a little distilled water and place the solution in a glass tube for testing by the spectroscope. As you know, ordinary sunlight, when it passes through a prism, is split up into a series of rainbow colours, which follow each other in invariable order. If, however, before reaching the prism the light is made to pass through our solution, if there is any blood in the solution two dark lines will always be found at a certain part of the spectrum.

The presence of these two bands practically proves that the stain was that of blood; but, whether the blood was human or not, the spectroscope will not tell you. We must now call in the microscope and examine the solution through it.

We shall find then that the solution (if of blood) is full of minute corpuscles (so tiny that from 3,000 to 4,000 of them, if placed side by side, would only cover an inch, while a cubic inch would contain something like 150,000,000 of them); and if these corpuscles are of a certain shape, round and with a depressed centre, we know that the blood in the stain is that of a human being.

We can tell, too, from the spectrum, which changes with the age of the stain, roughly how long it is since the crime was committed. There is practically no limit to this test of blood, for stains a hundred years old and more have been identified beyond any doubt by the methods I have described.

The detection of poisons is a much more prolonged and intricate business; although it may be simplified by symptoms observed before death. For instance, if the pupils of the dying man's eyes are very much contracted and he is very drowsy, the poison is probably opium; if there is sickness accompanied by considerable pain, it may be arsenic or antimony; if there are cramps and colic with great thirst, lead is suspected, and so on.

But let us imagine a case of arsenic poisoning, and let us suppose even that the victim has died many months ago, we can still bring conviction home with the most absolute certainty, and this is how it is done.

What is technically called a "brew" is made of the parts of the body submitted for analysis, and a little of this is placed in a test-tube. To the solution are then added a little hydrochloric acid and a piece of copper. This piece of copper is an infallible detective; for, as if by magic, it draws to it every particle of arsenic in the solution, the arsenic being deposited on it in the form of a grey coat.

We then take out the copper, thoroughly wash and dry it, put it in another special glass-tube, coming almost to a point at one end, and heat it. Now the copper, which before had attracted the arsenic, drives it away, and it takes refuge from its fickle lover on the sides of the tube in the form of crystals, which from their peculiar shape can be identified

under the microscope as those of arsenic.

By this means the tiniest particle of arsenic can be detected in the body long after it has been the means of causing death.

Of course, the real difficulty comes where there is no clue whatever to the nature of the poison which has caused death, and then the process of detection is long and difficult, although absolutely certain. For our laboratory has a detective concealed in almost every bottle. Thus hydrochloric acid will reduce mercury or lead in a test-solution to a white powder; sulphuretted hydrogen will betray the presence of another group of poisons, including arsenic, bismuth, and tin; while further processes will separate one of a group from another, until the actual poison that did the deed stands convicted.

Thus, even from this very brief description you can see that there is no detective so infallible as that which is hidden away in a stoppered bottle, although it is doomed to blush unseen, while others appropriate the credit.

Goldwin Smith vs. Disraeli.

It was generally known that in Disraeli's novel "Lothair," Professor Goldwin Smith, then of Oxford, but now of Toronto, Canada, figured as the Oxford Professor. Professor Smith resented this portrayal in the following letter to Disraeli.

"In your 'Lothair' you introduce an Oxford professor who is about to emigrate to America, and you describe him as a social parasite.

You well know that if you had ventured openly to accuse me of any social baseness, you would have had to answer for your words. But when, sheltering yourself under the literary forms of a work of fiction, you seek to traduce with impunity the social character of a political opponent, your expressions can touch no man's honor—they are the stingless insults of a coward."

Conan Doyle's Suggestion.

Derailing trains has become a favourite form of warfare with the Boers. In a letter to the London Times Conan Doyle makes a pertinent suggestion regarding it. We give his letter here.

To the Editor of the Times.

Sir,—Would it not be perfectly feasible

to put a truck full of Boer irreconcilables behind every engine which passes through a dangerous part of country? Two of these dastardly affairs in the last few weeks have cost us 40 men killed and wounded, while the sum total of men who have been maimed in this fashion during the war amounts to many hundreds. Such a practice as I suggest would infallibly put an end to it, and is so obvious that it is difficult to imagine why it has not been done. The Germans in 1870 continually carried French hostages in the trains.

Yours faithfully,

A. CONAN DOYLE.

Undershaw, Hindhead, Haslemere.

Not to be Beaten.

A member of a certain workmen's club recently took a friend into the new building and showed him round the place. The latter, as he remarked more than once, had "travelled and seen a lot" in his time. When the billiard-room was reached a friendly game was suggested and the visitor happened to lose.

"Oh, well," he calmly remarked, as he put on his coat, "you don't play a bad game, Jack. But, you see, I was handicapped. I've been used to playing on a lot bigger table than that."

This was rather surprising, considering that the table was a full-sized one. Jack, however, proved quite equal to the task of answering the traveller one.

"Oh," he exclaimed, without turning a hair, "this isn't our billiard table, you know, it's merely a card table. We couldn't have the proper billiard table, because some of our fellows are playing a cricket match on it."

And the visitor subsided.

One of the most distinguished women in England is undoubtedly Lady Dilke, who furnishes one of the few examples of well-known women who are older than their husbands, for she will be sixty-one on September 2nd, while Sir Charles Dilke is only fifty-eight. For many years she was a recognized critic on fine art, and she contributed articles on her favorite subjects, not only to English, but to French publications, while she has also written for the "Encyclopaedia Britannica."

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The Judge was Interested Too.

The late Sir Frank Lockwood was wont to relate with great relish an incident that happened while he was yet young as a lawyer. A barrister was conducting the prosecution of a man for stealing a teacup, and in the middle of his address to the jury a telegram was placed in his hand. Instantly the impetuous recipient, who had taken a five-shilling chance in the Bar "sweep," exclaimed, joyously:—

"Galopin's won—and I've won!"

His lordship, taken aback by this extraordinary proceeding, demanded to know the meaning of it. The barrister apologized for his conduct and craved forgiveness.

"It is most improper," said his lordship, "and I trust it may never occur again!"

The case was then about to be resumed, when the judge drily intervened with:—

"Oh, by-the-bye, Mr. X., did the telegram say what was third?"

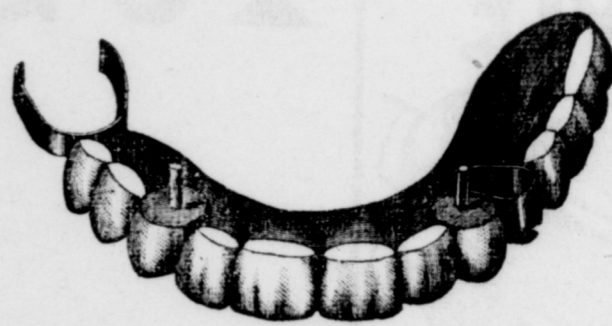
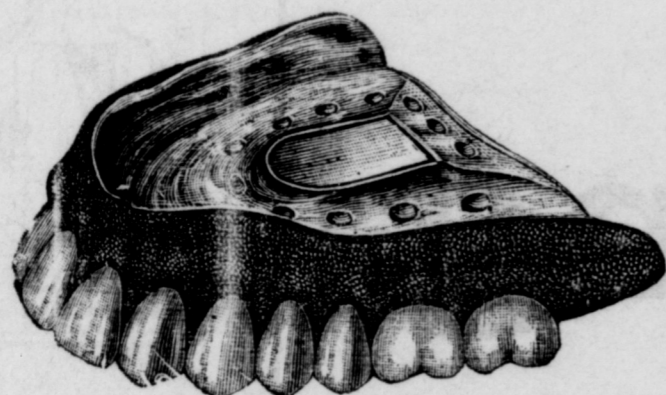
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