

The Arnewood Mystery

BY MAURICE H. HERVEY.

Author of "Dead Man's Court," "Somerville's Crime," "Dartmoor," "Maravin's Money," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VI. (Continued.)

Mr. Traill unlocked a drawer, and, after a brief search, produced the photographs of the dead man which he had previously sent me. Apparently, they sufficed to remove whatever doubts he had at first entertained, and he gave a very audible sigh of relief as he handed me all three photographs. With just a brief look, I passed them on to Mr. O'Flynn.

"This gentleman," I explained, "represents the solicitors of the deceased." "Aye! deceased he is, sure enough!" broke in the old clerk, "if there's any truth in a camera. And murdered, too, didn't you tell me? Lord be good to us all! But London's an awful wicked place!"

"May I ask the name of your late client?" queried the inspector, ignoring this reflection upon the depravity of the metropolis.

"Luke Arnewood of Arnewood Hall, in the County Kildare," replied Mr. O'Flynn.

"That tallies exactly with the initials tattooed on the left arm," remarked the detective, in a sort of "aside" to me. "In fact, I suppose we may almost take it for granted that the dead man's identity has been established."

"Yes," I assented, "beyond all doubt, I think. The Chapter of Accidents has supplied the clue, after all, you see. And, what is more, I can give you some particulars of this Luke Arnewood's antecedents and movements, which should help you materially towards a satisfactory solution of the whole case."

Inspector Traill's eyes sparkled. "You're a good fellow, Weston," he said, warmly, "and you have done me a turn in this business I shall never forget. Just give me the main outlines now, and let me come down upon you for the details later on. By the way, does anyone else know of your discovery?"

"Only Mr. O'Flynn," I told him, lowering my voice, "and I expect he's dying to rush off to a telegraph office to notify his principals in Dublin."

"Very likely," he whispered back; "but I can't afford to let him do so until I've made out my own report first. Mr. O'Flynn," he added, in his natural voice, "I must ask you, in the interests of justice, to give very careful attention to a statement which Mr. Weston is about to make, and which may need your corroboration."

"Faith, I'll corroborate anything in reason," was the reply, "if you'll just wait till I let Mr. O'Brien know I'm after finding Mr. Luke."

Mr. Traill gave me a significant look. This queer old Irishman was quite prepared to claim the discovery as his own, and thereby reduce the credit due to Scotland Yard to a minimum.

"Hold hard a bit there," he said, rather sharply. "In the first place, despite the resemblance of the portraits, the identity cannot be regarded as established without further proof. And, secondly, I don't exactly see where your claim to having found Mr. Luke (as you put it) comes in at all. The credit of that lies with Mr. Weston, I take it."

"And, sure, isn't he employed by O'Brien & Grudger, in this business, the same as myself?" retorted the old man, testily. "And, for the matter of that, didn't we find it out between us? Where would you both be now but for the picture I showed him of Mr. Luke, taken in Cooktown? Answer me that, please!"

Inspector Traill looked somewhat nonplussed at this home-thrust, as, indeed, he very well might be. What the old clerk said was perfectly true. But for this photograph, the identity of the murdered man would still have remained a mystery. But the detective possessed one great quality—absolute self-command—in a very high degree; and it was by no means his wish to offend the astute Irishman.

"Come, come, Mr. O'Flynn," he said, suavely, "you really must not take what I said in so irvidious a light. I only ask you to listen to Mr. Weston's statement, and to add thereto any remarks you may deem relevant. After that you may send what messages you please to Dublin."

Mr. O'Flynn acquiesced, a little sulkily, as though suspecting some plan to outwit him. However, he followed my remarks with great attention, and occasionally interjected hints very much to the point. Indeed, by the time I had concluded, he had risen considerably in my opinion as a very wise old fox; and I could see that Mr. Traill treated his suggestions as of the utmost value.

"Thank you, very much, gentlemen," he remarked, as he pinned together the slips of his report. "I think I can assure you that, in this case, any reasonable claim you may choose to send in for your time and trouble in coming here will be allowed. Meanwhile, you must let me offer you a whisky and soda. I shall be back in two minutes."

"You have ample time to get ahead of the press," rejoined Traill, coolly. "A good quarter of an hour, I should say, at least."

"A quarter of an hour!" roared the indignant Irishman, making a bolt for the door. "That's what comes of giving information to the police!" And, without further parley, he fled to the nearest telegraph office.

"Clever old party, your Irish friend," remarked Traill, laughing; "and I fancy he'll be of use to us yet, before we get at the bottom of this queer case. But it was rather confiding of him to expect me to let him use the wires before I had my irons in the fire. By the way, I suppose that, having ascertained the fate of the missing heir, your interest in the affair practically ends, eh?"

"Why, yes," I assented, somewhat reluctantly. "Practically, I suppose it does, so far as Hawkins & Co. are concerned; but, personally, I am as keen as ever to solve the mystery of poor Tom Webb's disappearance, and that would seem to be bound up in the running to earth of the man who strangled Luke Arnewood."

"That is so," said Traill, "unless appearances lie even worse than usual. But, in the name of common sense, my dear fellow, don't buy yourself up with any hope of ever seeing Webb alive. It is simply impossible that he should evade capture all this time, were he still above ground."

"I'm afraid you're right," I replied, despondently. "But it's some comfort to know that the case is still in your hands, and that you seem more hopeful of worrying through now than I have ever seen you before."

"Yes, thanks to the happy thought which prompted you to bring Mr. O'Flynn here," he rejoined, briskly. "And now, to drop 'tee business' for a moment, may I ask you a very personal question?"

"Certainly, any question you choose."

"Have you any special reason (apart, of course, from ordinary friendship) for your evident anxiety to ascertain Webb's fate?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have. I was practically engaged to his sister before this wretched affair—"

"I understand," he said, interrupting me, "Womar-like she blames you for not saving him against himself, as the phrase goes. Well, between ourselves, it is pretty well recognized here that this is one of the most awkward cases we have had to deal with for some years past. The idea in 'the Yard' is that it was a 'one-man job,' and I needn't tell you, who are almost one of us, that it's long odds against our making a clever scoundrel who works alone, or who—if he has a confederate—puts the latter out of the way before he has time to round on him."

"I won't have it even suggested that poor Tom Webb was a confederate in this affair!" I rejoined, hotly.

"Well, call him a dupe, if you like," said Traill. "It is clear that he was mixed up in the business, somehow or other, and I have not the faintest doubt that his knowledge of the crime cost him his life. However, let that pass for the present. The full truth can only come out when we have the actual murderer by the heels. Thanks to you, I have now a real clue to work upon, and—I think I see my way."

"These last words were said in a singularly calm, convincing way. I saw that Tom Traill, although a man well under thirty, and but recently promoted as inspector, was regarded as one of the smartest men in the department; and his quiet confidence carried conviction with it that I would yet stand justified in the eyes of Midge Webb. True, I would rather have stood indebted to my own personal efforts than to his; but I was not my own master, and I could not well ask for leave on private affairs at a time when Mr. Hawkins, as yet barely convalescent, could so ill spare me. And this I explained to sympathizing Inspector Traill."

"I understand perfectly," was his comment; "and I think it very hard lines that, having found the scene, you should be debarred from joining in the hunt; but, at all events, you can have a look-in, now and then. For instance, what's the earliest you can get away from the office this afternoon?"

"Five, or a quarter to," I answered, brightening up.

"That will do, all right," he rejoined. "I'll call for you at five sharp. Dress a bit roughly, and don't bring any valuables or much money."

"May I ask where you are going to, Solho?"

"No," he replied, "try again."

"Aboard the Walroa, then?" then, I suggested.

"Quite right," he assented, approvingly. "The Walroa it is. She's now berthed in the Southwest India docks; and one of my men, who is used to seafaring folk, has her under observation. But, but, at all events, you can have a look-in, now and then. For instance, what's the earliest you can get away from the office this afternoon?"

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