

The
**Sapient
Monkey**

HEADON HILL (F.E. GRAINGER)

“VINTAGE SHORT MYSTERY CLASSICS”

Period Short Stories of Mystery, Crime & Intrigue

#20

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“Vintage Short Mystery Classics” have been selected by Daniel Elton Harmon, author of “The Harper Chronicles,” with the intent of introducing new readers to notable works of short historical fiction in the mystery/gothic/crime vein. For more information, please visit the author’s Web site at www.danieleltonharmon.com.

You’ve undoubtedly read mystery stories which took you into the complexities of the financial world, and you’ve read mystery, crime and supernatural tales involving animals. Here, you’ll discover both elements in a case fathomed by Sebastian Zambra, one of the fictitious private investigators created by English author Headon Hill (1857-1927).

Zambra is engaged by the father of a suspect to exonerate his son—a situation with several similarities to a Sherlock Holmes plot by Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet.”

“Headon Hill” was a pseudonym for Francis Edward Grainger, who wrote a number of stories as well as novels. This piece appeared originally in The Million magazine in 1892.

The Sapient Monkey

I would advise every person whose duties take him into the field of "private enquiry" to go steadily through the daily papers the first thing every morning. Personally I have found the practice most useful, for there are not many causes célèbres in which my services are not enlisted on one side or the other, and by this method I am always up in my main facts before I am summoned to assist. When I read the account of the proceedings at Bow Street against Franklin Gale in connection with the Tudways' bank robbery, I remember thinking that on the face of it there never was a clearer case against a misguided young man.

Condensed for the sake of brevity, the police-court report disclosed the following state of things.

Franklin Gale, clerk, aged twenty-three, in the employment of Messrs. Tudways, the well-known private bankers of the Strand, was brought up on a warrant charged with stealing the sum of £500—being the moneys of his employers. Mr. James Spruce, assistant cashier at the bank, gave evidence to the effect that he missed the money from his till on the afternoon of July 22. On making up his cash for the day he discovered that he was short of £300 worth of notes and £200 in gold. He had no idea how the amount had been abstracted. The prisoner was an assistant bookkeeper at the bank, and had access behind the counter. Detective-sergeant Simmons said that the case had been placed in his hands for the purpose of

tracing the stolen notes. He had ascertained that one of them—of the value of £5—had been paid to Messrs. Crosthwaite & Co., tailors, of New Bond Street, on July 27th, by Franklin Gale. As a result, he had applied for a warrant, and had arrested the prisoner. The latter was remanded for a week, at the end of which period it was expected that further evidence would be forthcoming.

I had hardly finished reading the report when a telegram was put into my hands demanding my immediate presence at "Rosemount", Twickenham. From the address given, and from the name of "Gale" appended to the despatch, I concluded that the affair at 'Tudways' Bank was the cause of the summons. I had little doubt that I was to be retained in the interests of the prisoner, and my surmise proved correct.

"Rosemount" was by no means the usual kind of abode from which the ordinary run of bank clerks come gaily trooping into the great City in shoals by the early trains. There was nothing of cheap gentility about the "pleasant suburban residence standing in its own grounds of an acre", as the house-agent would say—with its lawns sloping down to the river, shaded by mulberry and chestnut trees, and plentifully garnished with the noble flower which gave it half its name. "Rosemount" was assuredly the home either of some prosperous merchant or of a private gentleman, and when I crossed its threshold I did so quite prepared for the fuller enlightenment which was to follow. Mr. Franklin Gale was evidently not one of the struggling genus bank clerk, but must be the son of well-to-do people, and not yet flown from the parent nest. When I left my office I had thought that I was bound on a forlorn hope, but at the sight of "Rosemount"—my first

real "touch" of the case—my spirits revived. Why should a young man living amid such signs of wealth want to rob his employers? Of course I recognized that the youth of the prisoner precluded the probability of the place being his own. Had he been older, I should have reversed the argument. "Rosemount" in the actual occupation of a middle-aged bank clerk would have been *prima-facie* evidence of a tendency to outrun the constable.

I was shown into a well-appointed library, where I was received by a tall, silver-haired old gentleman of ruddy complexion, who had apparently been pacing the floor in a state of agitation. His warm greeting towards me—a perfect stranger—had the air of one who clutches at a straw.

"I have sent for you to prove my son's innocence, Mr. Zambra," he said. "Franklin no more stole that money than I did. In the first place, he didn't want it; and, secondly, if he had been ever so pushed for cash, he would rather have cut off his right hand than put it into his employer's till. Besides, if these thick-headed policemen were bound to lock one of us up, it ought to have been me. The five-pound note with which Franklin paid his tailor was one—so he assures me, and I believe him—which I gave him myself."

"Perhaps you would give me the facts in detail?" I replied.

"As to the robbery, both my son and I are as much in the dark as old Tudway himself," Mr. Gale proceeded. "Franklin tells me that Spruce, the cashier, is accredited to be a most careful man, and the very last to leave his till to take care of itself. The facts that came out in evidence are perfectly true. Franklin's desk is close to the counter,

and the note identified as one of the missing ones was certainly paid by him to Crosthwaite & Co., of New Bond Street, a few days after the robbery. It bears his endorsement, so there can be no doubt about that.

“So much for their side of the case. Ours is, I must confess, from a legal point of view, much weaker, and lies in my son’s assertion of innocence, coupled with the knowledge of myself and his mother and his sisters that he is incapable of such a crime. Franklin insists that the note he paid to Crosthwaite & Co., the tailors, was one that I gave him on the morning of the 22nd. I remember perfectly well giving him a five-pound note at breakfast on that day, just before he left for town, so that he must have had it several hours before the robbery was committed. Franklin says that he had no other banknotes between the 22nd and the 27th, and that he cannot, therefore, be mistaken. The note which I gave him I got fresh from my own bankers a day or two before, together with some others; and here is the most unfortunate point in the case. The solicitor whom I have engaged to defend Franklin has made the necessary enquiries at my bankers, and finds that the note paid to the tailors is *not* one of those which I drew from the bank.”

“Did not your son take notice of the number of the note you gave him?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, no. He is too much worried about the numbers of notes at his business, he says, to note those which are his own property. He simply sticks to it that he knows it must be the same note because he had no other.”

In the slang of the day, Mr. Franklin Gale’s story seemed a little too thin. There was the evidence of Tudways that the note paid to the tailor was one of those stolen

from them, and there was the evidence of Mr. Gale, senior's, bankers that it was not one of those handed to their client. What was the use of the prisoner protesting in the face of this that he had paid his tailor with his father's present? The notes stolen from Tudways were, I remembered reading, consecutive ones of a series, so that the possibility of young Gale having at the bank changed his father's gift for another note, which was subsequently stolen, was knocked on the head. Besides, he maintained that it was the *same* note.

"I should like to know something of your son's circumstances and position," I said, trying to divest the question of any air of suspicion it might have implied.

"I am glad you asked me that," returned Mr. Gale, "for it touches the very essence of the whole case. My son's circumstances and position are such that were he the most unprincipled scoundrel in creation he would have been nothing less than an idiot to have done this thing. Franklin is not on the footing of an ordinary bank clerk, Mr. Zambra. I am a rich man, and can afford to give him anything in reason, though he is too good a lad ever to have taken advantage of me. Tudway is an old friend of mine, and I got him to take Franklin into the bank with a view to a partnership. Everything was going on swimmingly towards that end; the boy had perfected himself in his duties, and made himself valuable; I was prepared to invest a certain amount of capital on his behalf; and, lastly, Tudway, who lives next door to me here, got so fond of him that he allowed Franklin to become engaged of his daughter Maud. Would any young man in his senses go and steal a paltry £500 under such circumstances as that?"

I thought not, but I did not say so yet.

“What are Mr. Tudways’ views about the robbery?” I asked.

“Tudway is an old fool,” replied Mr. Gale. “He believes what the police tell him, and the police tell him that Franklin is guilty. I have no patience with him. I ordered him out of this house last night. He had the audacity to come and offer not to press the charge if the boy would confess.”

“And Miss Tudway?”

“Ah! she’s a brick. Maud sticks to him like a true woman. But what is the use of our sticking to him against such evidence?” broke down poor Mr. Gale, impotently. “Can you, Mr. Zambra, give us a crumb of hope?”

Before I could reply there was a knock at the library door, and a tall, graceful girl entered the room. Her face bore traces of weeping, and she looked anxious and dejected; but I could see that she was naturally quick and intelligent.

“I have just run over to see if there is any fresh news this morning,” she said, with an enquiring glance at me.

“This is Mr. Zambra, my dear, come to help us,” said Mr. Gale; “and this,” he continued, turning to me, “is Miss Maud Tudway. We are all enlisted in the same cause.”

“You will be able to prove Mr. Franklin Gale’s innocence, sir?” she exclaimed.

“I hope so,” I said; “and the best way to do it will be to trace the robbery to its real author. Has Mr. Franklin any suspicions on that head?”

“He is as much puzzled as we,” said Miss Tudway. “I went with Mr. Gale here to see him in that horrible place yesterday, and he said there was absolutely no one in the

bank he cared to suspect. But he *must* get off the next time he appears. My evidence ought to do that. I saw with my own eyes that he had only one £5 note in his purse on the 25th—that is two days before he paid the tailor, and three days after the robbery.”

“I am afraid that won’t help us much,” I said. “You see, he might easily have had the missing notes elsewhere. But tell me, under what circumstances did you see the £5 note?”

“There was a garden party at our house,” replied Miss Tudway, “and Franklin was there. During the afternoon a man came to the gate with an accordion and a performing monkey, and asked permission to show the monkey’s tricks. We had the man in, and after the monkey had done a lot of clever things the man said that the animal could tell a good banknote from a ‘flash’ one. He was provided with spurious notes for the purpose; would any gentlemen lend him a good note for a minute, just to show the trick? The man was quite close to Franklin, who was sitting next to me. Franklin, seeing the man’s hand held out towards him, took out his purse and handed him a note, at the same time calling my attention to the fact that it was his only one, and laughingly saying that he hoped the man was honest. The sham note and the good one were placed before the monkey, who at once tore up the bad note and handed the good one back to Franklin.”

“This is more important than it seems,” I said, after a moment’s review of the whole case. “I must find that man with the monkey, but it bids fair to be difficult. There must be so many of them in that line of business.”

Miss Tudway smiled for the first time during the interview.

“It is possible that I may be of use to you there,” she said. “I go in for amateur photography, and I thought that the man and his monkey made such a good ‘subject’ that I insisted on taking him before he left. Shall I fetch the photograph?”

“By all means,” I said. “Photography is of the greatest use to me in my work. I generally arrange it myself, but if you have chanced to take the right picture for me in this case so much the better.”

Miss Tudway hurried across to her father’s house and quickly returned with the photograph. It was a fair effort for an amateur, and portrayed an individual of the usual seedy stamp, equipped with a huge accordion and a small monkey secured by a string. With this in my hand it would only be a matter of time before I found the itinerant juggler who had presented himself at the Tudways’ garden party, and I took my leave of old Mr. Gale and Miss Maud in a much more hopeful frame of mind. Every circumstance outside the terrible array of actual evidence pointed to my client’s innocence, and if this evidence had been manufactured for the purpose, I felt certain that the “monkey man” had had a hand in it.

On arriving at my office I summoned one of my assistants—a veteran of doubtful antecedents—who owns to no other name than “Old Jemmy”. Old Jemmy’s particular line of business is a thorough knowledge of the slums and the folk who dwell there; and I knew that after an hour or two on Saffron Hill my ferret, armed with the photograph, would bring me the information I wanted. Towards evening Old Jemmy came in with his report, to the effect that the “party” I was after was to be found in the top attic of 7 Little Didman’s

Fields, Hatton Garden, just recovering from the effects of a prolonged spree.

"He's been drunk for three or four days, the landlord told me," Old Jemmy said. "Had a stroke of luck, it seems, but he is expected to go on tramp tomorrow, now his coin has given out. His name is Pietro Schilizzi."

I knew I was on the right scent now, and that the "monkey man" had been made the instrument of *changing* the note which Franklin Gale had lent him for one of the stolen ones. A quick cab took me to Little Didman's Fields in a quarter of an hour, and I was soon standing inside the doorway of a pestilential apartment on the top floor of No. 7, which had been pointed out to me as the abode of Pietro Schilizzi. A succession of snores from a heap of rags in a corner told me the whereabouts of the occupier. I went over, and shaking him roughly by the shoulder, said in Italian:

"Pietro, I want you to tell me about that little juggle with the banknote at Twickenham the other day. You will be well rewarded."

The fellow rubbed his eyes in half-drunken astonishment, but there certainly was no guilty fear about him as he replied:

"Certainly, signor; anything for money. There was nothing wrong about the note, was there? Anyhow, I acted innocently in the matter."

"No one finds fault with you," I said; "but see, here is a five-pound note. It shall be yours if you will tell me exactly what happened."

"I was with my monkey up at Highgate the other evening," Mr. Schilizzi began, "and was showing Jacko's trick of telling a good note from a bad one. It was a small

house in the Napier Road. After I had finished, the gentleman took me into a public house and stood me a drink. He wanted me to do something for him, he said. He had a young friend who was careless, and never took the number of notes, and he wanted to teach him a lesson. He had a bet about the number of a note, he said. Would I go down to Twickenham next day to a house he described, where there was to be a party, and do my trick with the monkey? I was to borrow a note from the young gentleman, and then, instead of giving him back his own note after the performance, I was to substitute one which the Highgate gentleman gave me for the purpose. He met me at Twickenham next day, and came behind the garden wall to point out the young gentleman to me. I managed it just as the Highgate gentleman wanted, and he gave me a couple of pounds for my pains. I have done no wrong; the note I gave back was a good one."

"Yes," I said, "but it happens to have been stolen. Put on your hat and show me where this man lives in Highgate."

The Napier Road was a shabby street of dingy houses, with a public house at the corner. Pietro stopped about half-way down the row and pointed out No. 21.

"That is where the gentleman lives," he said.

We retraced our steps to the corner public house.

"Can you tell me who lives at No. 21?" I asked of the landlord, who happened to be in the bar.

"Certainly," was the answer; "it is Mr. James Spruce—a good customer of mine, and the best billiard player hereabouts. He is a cashier at Messrs. Tudways' bank, in the Strand, I believe."

IT ALL CAME OUT AT THE TRIAL—not of Franklin Gale, but of James Spruce, the fraudulent cashier. Spruce had himself abstracted the notes and gold entrusted to him, and his guilty conscience telling him that he might be suspected, he had cast about for a means of throwing suspicion on some other person. Chancing to witness the performance of Pietro's monkey, he had grasped the opportunity for foisting one of the stolen notes on Franklin Gale, knowing that sooner or later it would be traced to him. The other notes he had intended to hold over till it was safe to send them out of the country; but the gold was the principal object of his theft.

Mr. Tudway, the banker, was, I hear, so cut up about the false accusation that he had made against his favourite that he insisted on Franklin joining him as a partner at once, and the marriage is to take place before very long. I am also told that the photograph of the "monkey man", handsomely enlarged and mounted, will form one of the mural decorations of the young couple.

—*HEADON HILL (FRANCIS EDWARD GRAINGER)*

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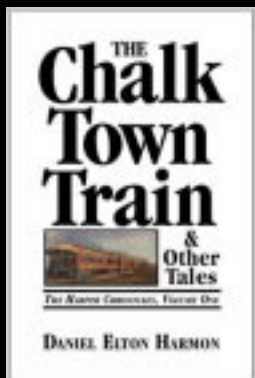
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