THE MAN IN THE WELL

By PIERRE SALES

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CHAPTER I.

A Gruesome Discovery.

Day was breaking, and the workmen and country folks were ready to begin their labor. The silence of the night was at last disturbed by the heavy rumbling of carts. The morning mists rose slowly from the ground, the greyish vapor creeping up from the earth until it reached the highest branches of the trees, lingering there for a moment, and then fading away into the rising sun which touched the hilltops with reddish tints.

Inside the fortifications Paris still slept. Employees at the excise office went about their duties with half-closed eyes, searching but carelessly in the carts which entered the city gates. The workmen's train rolled round Paris, throwing out a cloud of smoke.

Father Teroigne and his son were returning from the halles with their cart full of fresh vegetables and luscious fruit. The guard at the excise office nodded to him as he pulled up his horse at the city gates.

"Fine day, eh, Father Teroigne?" he remarked.

"Fine! If you're going off duty now, M. Millette, I'll give you a lift to your place."

"Good. I'll be through in a few minutes."

The carts passed—some going into the city, some coming out. There was a continual cry from the officials:

"Anything to declare? Anything to declare?"

"No; nothing," came the response. The excise employee poked into the baskets and cases and rummaged through the straw.

"Nothing; pass on." It was time for Millette to go off duty. He jumped up beside Father Teroigne and they drove off.

"Many orders today?" asked the excise employee.

"Two large baskets of the choicest fruits and vegetables for the Farades. I'm going there now. We'll turn to the right."

The cart stopped at the entrance of an avenue which led to the Farades garden. The three men got down. Millette held the horse's head.

"Son, you take that one in for M. Louis, and I'll take this for M. Arthur," said Father Teroigne.

The two men with their fruits and vegetables went into the separate gardens, the grounds of which were divided by a low hedge.

"No need to wake up the servants. Let's leave them on the stoop," said the son. They deposited their baskets on the steps and walked back down the garden path. Inquisitive Millette stood at the gate peeping in. He had left the horse to look after itself. Father and son had reached an old well which stood between the two gardens.

"Let's take a drink. The water is always cold and fresh here," said the younger Teroigne.

"You draw your own drink and I'll draw mine and M. Millette's," said the father: "there is no better water anywhere than in this old well—it's worth any wine you can buy."

Above the well were two pulleys so that each household had its own buckets and ropes. The two men pulled on the ropes—old Teroigne drew up his bucket. He looked into the clear water and then uttered a cry of surprise.

"God bless me," he exclaimed, "if Mademoiselle Valentine didn't drop her diamond ring down there!"

He picked out of the bucket a thick gold ring set with a magnificent diamond.

"Compound it," cried young Teroigne on the other side of the hedge, "my bucket won't come up—something's caught on it down below!"

The three men tried to pull up the bucket, but their efforts were futile. They leaned over the brink and peered down into the well. When they raised their heads their faces were pale, for in the depths of the old well they had seen a dark form.

Instinctively they turned their eyes toward the two handsome houses, the gardens of which overlooked the Avenue du Parc des Princes. The three men continued to stare at the shuttered windows. Millette was the first to speak.

"Has something happened up there?" he asked in a whisper.

"There never were two families more united than those two," vouched Father Teroigne. "Those two brothers used to be the best of friends, but lately they have not been hardly on speaking terms. What's happened? What's the ring doing in this bucket, and what's that black thing down there?"

"Perhaps it's an old dress than got chucked in by mistake," hazarded the son.

Finally they decided to knock at the kitchen door. Monsieur Arthur's man servant and Monsieur Louis's cook appeared. Both were grumbling at being disturbed at that early hour.

"Well, what's the matter, Father Teroigne?" cried the cook. "Can't you leave your things on the porch and be off?"

Without speaking, the vegetable man made a sign for the two servants to come down and follow him to the well. In a few minutes the cook and the butler had followed them down to the bottom of the garden. Millette, with usual importance of an excise officer, felt that it was his duty to open the conversation.

"See here, my girl," he said to the cook, "are you sure that Monsieur Louis is asleep up-stairs? And you, young man"—to the butler—"can you swear that Monsier Arthur is still in his room?"

The servants seemed surprised at this question.

"Why, how should we know?" they exclaimed together. They knew that their masters had returned from Paris at the usual hour the evening before, and that each had spent the evening in his own house. They had been a little anxious, for each gentleman had been expecting someone who had not arrived.

"Look down in the well," said Millette in a mysterious whisper.

They looked and then shrank back, for to them also it seemed that the dark mass resembled a body.

"Now," said the excise man, "just go up and see if your two masters are both in their rooms."

"I bet we'll find out what it is first," said Father Teroigne. "Will you go down the well, son?"

Young Teroigne, on the other side of the hedge, hesitated a moment. Then his curiosity overcame his fear.

"Sure! I'd like to go down," he replied.

He joined his father on the other side of the hedge. They made certain that the ropes were strong enough to bear his weight. Then, with a swagger, he got into the bucket.

"Go on, let me down," he cried, sinking into a crouching position and clutching the ropes with both hands.

The bucket, held by all hands, made the descent slowly. Very gradually it began to mingle with the dark shadows of the pit. Soon they heard the splash as it touched the water.

"Stop! I'm there," sailed out young Teroigne. There was a moment of suppressed excitement.

Without looking round him, the youth below remained motionless. His eyes slowly became accustomed to the obscurity. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he turned, leaned down, and touched the dark mass that had puzzled them. Those above waited, breathless. He tried to move the mass. Then he let out a startled cry as the purple, distorted face of a drowned man gazed up at him.

"Hi! Pull me up! Quick—pull me up!" he yelled.

They hastened to draw up the bucket, and the youth, livid with terror, scrambled out and fell in a heap on the ground.

"Say! What it is? What did you see?"

"Oh, Sikes. I ain't afraid to see a drowned man in the Seine, but here in this old well. Oh, Lord!"

"A drowned man?"

"A big, strong man, and his body's leaning up against the other bucket, that's why we couldn't pull it up."

"Drowned, you say? Are you sure he's drowned?"

"Don't I know a drowned face when I see it. He drowned down there."

"Did you recognize him?" inquired Millette.

"No, I didn't. You go down and see if you'd recognize him."

But Millette decided that it would be better to notify the police at once.

"And our masters; we'll go and tell them," said the two servants in awe-struck tones.

"As you seem so sure they're both asleep, let 'em be," said Millette. "You, young man"—turning to the butler—"you go as fast as your legs can carry you and fetch the commissaire at Auteuil; and you, young Teroigne, stop looking so scared, and go and inform the police at Boulogne."

His opinion now was that one of the brothers had killed the other, so he was anxious to bring up the body before the alarm was given to the murderer.

The cook, Millette, and Father Teroigne waited behind a tree while the other two fetched the police. They did not want to be seen by any one from the house. In due time the commissaire arrived, followed by his men, carrying ropes. They reached the well.

"Now, young Teroigne, will you go down again?" asked the commissaire.

"Sure! I don't mind; but I won't go down alone," replied the youth.

"You're a lightweight and you can go down in the bucket like you did before. We'll drop one of you fellows down by the belt."

A policeman stepped forward and a stout cord was firmly attached to his belt. Young Teroigne got into the bucket and the two pulleys were put in motion. At this moment they heard a voice calling from the distance:

"Hi! What are you doing here, gentlemen?"

It was Arthur Farades. He was standing at his window only partly dressed. The commissaire called out:

"There's a corpse down here in your well and we're hauling it up."

"A corpse in my well?"

In less than a minute Arthur Farades had joined the group of men.

"How did they discover it?" That was his first question.

"You'll know that presently," replied the commissaire. A voice came from the depth of the well.

"It's a big man, chief. Throw down the ropes."

The policeman and young Teroigne raised the body with difficulty, and then tied the cords under the arms. While they were at their gruesome task, a man appeared on the other side of the hedge and asked what the commotion was about. It was M. Louis Farades.

"We are here in the name of the law," replied the commissaire gravely. "A crime has been committed in your gardens and I must ask you two gentlemen not to leave the premises without my permission."

The brothers looked from one to the other, but neither of them spoke. Then every man gave a hand to help haul up the heavy burden. Young Teroigne and the officer held the body to prevent it knocking against the sides of the well. M. Louis, who appeared perfectly calm, had sent his servants to fetch a mattress upon which to lay the body.

"Stand back!" cried the commissaire as the men began to crowd round. He whispered to an officer to keep a sharp eye on the two brothers and then they proceeded to the difficult task of lifting out the body. In a few minutes it was laid on the mattress and the police were able to examine it.

The victim was a tall, stout man of rather odd appearance. He wore a red waistcoat, a tan suit, and his hair was parted down the middle.

The brothers tried to push forward to see the victim, but the commissaire pushed them back.

"Not yet, gentlemen," he said. There were no wounds on the body, and yet the men found it strange that a man of his build could have been thrown into the well without a struggle.

"He must have been dead when he was thrown in," said the commissaire after a careful examination of the corpse.

"Are you or are you not going to let me see what has happened on my premises?" cried Arthur Farades angrily. Unlike his brother Louis, who was very calm, Arthur was of an excitable nature, and easily lost control of himself, but even Louis now raised his voice in protest.

The police by this time had raised the body, and had propped it up against the curb of the well and had opened the eyes. Then quite suddenly the commissaire gave the order for his men to stand back and the two brothers stood face to face with the man who had been found dead on their premises.

Both men gave a startled cry and instinctively recoiled. They seemed to forget the presence of the police and the neighbors who now filled the garden. They looked with horrified accusing eyes at one another and almost the same words fell from their lips:

"Wretch!"

"Scoundrel!"

The commissaire was eying them narrowly.

"What was that you said, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"Nothing! Nothing!" they answered, pale and trembling.

At this moment Arthur Farades's daughter, and the wife and daughter, Jeanne, of Louis Farades came hurrying down the garden patch.

"What does it all mean?" they cried with frightened faces.

Neither of the men addressed answered a word. Then the girls saw the body propped up against the wall and Jeanne tried to prevent her mother from seeing the dreadful sight.

"I think you ladies had better retire," said the commissaire; "I wish to question these gentlemen."

"No, I wish to stay with my husband," said Madame Louis faintly.

"Very well. Now M. Farades," continued the commissaire, "you both live in these two houses?"

"Yes; the one on the right is mine; the one on the left is my brother's," replied Arthur Farades.

"Is there any communication between the two houses?"

"None whatever. But, as you see, our gardens are separated by this hedge and this well, which we share in common."

"You admit that the well belongs to you both? Then in that case you are both held to be responsible for the crime."

"You suspect us!" they both cried indignantly.

"Gentlemen, you have always held an honorable position and have been highly respected in the community. But the body has been found on your premises, and—"

"But it is easy for any one to get into the back garden!" cried Arthur. "And if a crime has been committed, the murderers could have carried the body of their victim here and thrown it into the well."

The commissaire shrugged his shoulders. It was easy to see that he had formed his opinion. He had seen them shrink back in terror after they had view the body, and had heard what they said to each other.

"You may as well tell me frankly," he said. "You recognize the victim, do you not?"

Louis stepped up to the commissaire.

"As you are beginning an inquiry, monsieur," he said, "I think it would be better if you were to proceed in a more regular manner. If I have any information to give to the police, I shall give it to the investigating judge, and in private. I am not going to reply to your questions before this crowd of people whom you have permitted to enter my grounds."

The country commissaire recognized the justice of these words. He cleared the garden of the neighbors and sent for the judge.

"I know something," said the excise man, drawing himself up with importance, "but I won't tell it to anybody but the judge."

For twenty years Louis and Arthur Farades had lived side by side. Arthur Farades held an important position on the Bourse, and the younger brother was a partner in a large cloth manufactory.

Before their father had died he had often spoken to them of his younger brother, Jean Farades, who had run away from home when he was twenty years old. He had always spoken of this brother with great affection and he had searched in vain for him. When he died he had made his two sons promise that if Jean should return, the half of the estate should be given to him, for that was his share. Arthur and Louis after their father's death, began another search, but it proved futile and they had come to the conclusion that this long lost uncle must be dead.

The two sons became successful business man; both married, but Arthur Farades's wife died and his little girl was brought up by Madame Louis, the aunt.

Some months before the discovery of the crime, the two families were spending the evening in Arthur Farades's house when the postman delivered a letter which bore a foreign postmark. It was addressed to both the brothers.

"My dear nephews," it read, "when your father was alive he may have spoken to you of your uncle, who was a young rascal and who ran away from home. Well, I am your uncle Jean. I am no longer the silly fool that I was, but I cannot tell you in this letter all that has happened since I left France. One thing you may know; I have made a good round fortune, and this fortune is for you. I am coming home to give it to you. I have had some little trouble in finding out where you live. Now drop me a line and tell me if you have a little affection for your dear father's rascal of a brother. As soon as I have settled my affairs in Calcutta I shall start for Paris. Your old Uncle Jean."

It was Arthur Farades who had read the letter aloud. When he had finished there was a moment's silence. Then he said:

"I shall write to him tomorrow, the dear old chap."

"You mean we shall write to him," corrected Louis. For the first time in their lives the brothers were cold and distant to each other. The rest of the evening passed in silence. Jeanne and Valentine tried in vain to shake off the constraint.

The rich uncle announced the day of his return. Preparations were made in both houses to receive him. The brothers started for Paris in the morning at their usual hour and returned on the train that they were accustomed to take. That was the day when old Jean Farades was to arrive in Paris.

Each brother was confident that as soon as the investigating judge began his inquiry he could clear himself. M. Beaulieu, the investigating judge whom the prosecutor sent down, arrived in due time. The commissaire who had gone to meet him had quickly given him his opinion on the mysterious murder. From the beginning he had been suspicious of the two brothers.

"I am sure that the victim was known to them both, and they know something about the crime," he said.

After M. Beaulieu had examined the corpse he declared that the man must have been dead before he was thrown into the well. Then he began the inquiry. First he questioned Arthur Farades, who told him frankly that he knew the victim. It was an uncle who the day before had returned from Calcutta.

"Then he was murdered on the very day he arrived in Paris?" asked M. Beaulieu.

"Yes."

"And you saw him yesterday?"

"I spent a part of the day with him."

M. Beaulieu was surprised. If Arthur Farades was guilty he was committing himself.

"Tell me what you know," said the judge briefly; he wanted to get a statement from each man to see if they coincided. Arthur Farades told him that his uncle had been away for thirty years, but that now he had decided to return to France and live with them.

"Was he rich?"

"Very, I believe."

"I hear that for some weeks, you and your brother have been on unfriendly terms. What was the cause of this quarrel?"

"Nothing particular. Simply that our characters are different and we did not agree upon certain subjects. In spite of this dissension between my brother and myself we both went yesterday to the railway station to meet our uncle, and he was very much pleased to see us."

"Was he traveling alone?"

"No. A young Southerner was with him, a M. Jacques Velizay. He introduced him to us as his best friend, and said that he had done a great deal of business with him in India."

"In what line was your uncle?"

"He never mentioned his business, but I believe that he was an exporter of Indian shawls and rugs. My brother and I did not let uncle know that there was any coolness between us."

"At whose house did he stop?" M. Beaulieu put this question carelessly as though it were a matter of little importance.

"He did not stay at my house, I know that," said Louis decisively.

"Then he stayed with your brother?"

"I don't know. We had each furnished a suite of rooms for him so that he could be independent if he wished."

"And you don't know if he stayed with your brother?"

"No. All I know is that when he had got his baggage together he said: "Well, boys, business is business, and I shall be forced to leave you for a few hours to arrange some matters.' As he did not know the city, we both offered to accompany him, but he refused our offer. We told him the best way to get to Boulogne and how he could find our houses, and he left us, saying that he would arrive in time for dinner."

"Did he go off alone?"

"No. This Jacques Velizay, his traveling companion, accompanied him. I had another with my brother that, as he was the elder, our uncle should go to his house first, and come to mine after."

"And—"

"He never came into my house."

"He had been thrown into the well from your side of the garden. Can you offer any explanation of that?"

"I cannot. But I swear that since yesterday I have expected my uncle. I naturally thought that he had slept in my brother's house."

M. Beaulieu then put the same questions to Louis Farades. His replies were given concisely and clearly. It was evident that if the younger brother were guilty of the crime, nothing could shake his system of defense. The investigating judge decided that the two brothers should be held.

He went down into the garden again to examine the corpse. A crowd was standing round. There were even a few men on horseback who had left the riding path in the Bois de Boulogne and had turned into the Avenue du Parc des Princes to learn the cause of the excitement. One handsome distinguished-looking man seemed impatient for his friend to rejoin him.

"Pecheret, you imbecile," he called out, "what do you bring me down here for? I am not going to wait any longer."

He was in a hurry to be off; his mettlesome steed was pawing the ground.

"I want to see what is the matter," called back the man addressed as Pecheret.

"Nothing of importance, you rubber-neck."

"My dear Calesse, you are only half a Parisian if you are not curious. I am a Parisian to my finger-tips, consequently I am curiosity personified!"

"Hi! What's the matter, my good people?" he asked of the crowd.

"A man has been murdered," replied a stumpy, red-faced butcher.

Pecheret rode his horse up to the very garden gate. It was at this moment that M. Beaulieu gave orders to disperse the crowd. The Parisian turned and rode back grumbling.

"Oh, flute," he said; "I'd have given something to have seen that corpse."

The judge returned to Arthur Farades's house and questioned his daughter, Valentine. She confirmed in every detail the story her father had told. And on their side, Madame Louis and Jeanne declared that all the evening they had been expecting this uncle.

Neither brother had openly accused the other, but each seemed to give the impression that the victim had spent the evening in the other one's house.

"I believe that this Jacques Velizay is simply a person of their imagination," said the commissaire to M. Beaulieu.

"That is what I think. And I also think that no matter what they quarreled about before, they are now uniting their efforts to thwart the police. What puzzles me is that no one seems to have seen the victim last night. The servants of both the houses declare that he did not enter into the house in which they are employed."

The servants stated that they had sat up late in the hope that the visitor would arrive. Father Teroigne and his son were then questioned, but they could throw no light upon the mystery. There remained Millette, who seemed to have something to tell.

"And you, Millette?" asked the judge.

Millette gave an important wag to his head.

"Sure, monsieur, I know something, and although both the MM. Farades always seemed to me to be honorable gentlemen, I'm going to say what I know."

"Why didn't you say it before?" asked Father Teroigne.

"Because—"

"Silence!" ordered the judge. "Now, my man, what do you know?"

"I saw that corpse alive yesterday. That dead man was walking along when I saw him, and he had on that same red waistcoat."

Millette looked around to see what effect his words had produced.

"You are sure of what you are saying?" asked the judge.

"In our profession we have to be wide awake, sir. We have an eye on everybody who passes the gates."

"And you saw him pass the excise office?"

"I was as close to him as I am to you now. It was seven o'clock, and a lot of men were coming from the Auteil station to Boulogne, when I saw him come along with his red waistcoat."

"Was any one with him?"

The excise employe thought for a moment.

"I think he was with some one, but I couldn't swear to it, I guess he came in on the train, for it had just arrived."

"Try and remember what train it was!"

Millette frowned and appeared to think deeply for a few moments; then said:

"It was the six twenty-two train, or the six thirty. I'm not sure which. But it was one of the two."

"You ought to know if the victim was with either of the MM. Farades."

"I can say that, but I am sure that the two brothers came in on one of the trains."

"By the same train as the victim?"

"I didn't say that. I only say that they both came together.

"You must think of the gravity of your statement. Your testimony is very damaging for the two brothers."

"I swear that the victim passed by the Boulogne gates at six twenty-two or six thirty," said Millette, rolling his eyes solemnly.

Louis and Arthur Farades were again questioned.

"You still persist in saying that you left your uncle in Paris in the afternoon and that you did not see him alive again?"

"Yes."

"And yet he arrived in Boulogne yesterday on the same train that you did. The excise officer swears to that."

"Pardon, monsieur le juge, I said about the same hour," interposed Millette.

"Silence!"

The two brothers had turned deathly pale.

"You accuse us of the crime!" they both cried.

"I arrest you both for the murder of M. Jean Farades," replied the investigating judge solemnly.

CHAPTER II.

Search for the Murderer.

It was some months since Paul Merseins had been seen in the fashionable Paris salons, and rarely did his old friends see him at his club. "He has sown his wild oats and is settling down," they said.

Paul was an intelligent, congenial young fellow. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and had a certain income which permitted him to lead his own life.

He had passed his college examinations brilliantly and had held a high rank in artistic circles. Upon leaving college he had announced his intention of becoming an artist. He promptly wrote a book, composed two waltzes, and scribbled off a few love stories. Then recognizing that neither music nor literature agreed with his temperament, he turned his thoughts to painting.

There was a studio to rent upon the same floor upon which he had his bachelor apartment. He rented it and furnished it sumptuously.

When he presented the upholsterer's bill to his father, Merseins senior smiled.

"A studio! What for?"

"Why, to paint in of course," replied Paul.

"With models?"

"Probably."

"Pretty models?"

"I never liked anything ugly."

"Very well. Enjoy yourself for another two years. Then we will settle matters."

At the end of two years Merseins senior rapped on the door of his son's studio.

"Have you a sitting?" he asked. "Is any pretty model here? If so tell me and I'll come another time."

"No, father; you can come in. I had a row with the last. She was a red-haired—"

"Your love-affairs do not interest me," replied Merseins senior; "all I have to tell you, my boy, is that you have had your fling and the time has come for us to settle accounts."

Paul had no mother and all his love and respect was lavished on his father.

"Really?" said Paul in surprise.

"Yes, two thousand francs to publish your book. Here is the bill from the publisher."

"Yes, but how many copies have they sold? My royalties, you know—"

"They have sold fourteen copies."

Paul gave a long, soft whistle.

"Your music cost me almost as much, and what with your monthly allowance— Well, it is time you gave up painting, music and literature and did something worth while."

"I ask nothing better, because—"

"Because what?" asked the father.

"I'm hard hit this time, dad."

"What do you mean? Is it serious?"

"Never will be more so. It is Valentine Farades—you have met her?"

"Why, yes, and I have done business with her father on several occasions. Valentine is a lovely girl and just the very one I should like to see my son's wife. But you know, my boy, you can't ask a girl to marry you until you can show what you can do. I can get you a good position on the Bourse. Will you work?"

Paul stretched out his hand to his father.

"Try me father," was all he said.

At the end of six months Paul Merseins had settled down to business and was to be seen daily at the Bourse. He had shown his father what he could do, and the old man was well satisfied.

It was the day that the crime at Boulogne had been discovered. Paul had just finished his business and was hurrying to catch the train for Auteuil. He intended that afternoon to ask Valentine Farades to become his wife. No news of the crime had yet reached him. When he arrived at the garden gate he was surprised to find a policeman there.

"Nobody comes in here," said the officer rudely.

"But I want to see Mlle. Valentine Farades," said Merseins.

"Go next door then. She's in there."

Merseins was surprised, for he knew that the two families were not on friendly terms. However, he rang the bell next door and sent in his card by the servant. Valentine and Jeanne were sitting together.

"It is Paul," Valentine murmured, glancing at the card. "Jeanne, how shall I tell him?"

"Hide nothing from him; just tell him everything frankly," Jeanne answered.

Valentine Farades went into the drawing-room and in a few words told Paul Merseins that her father and uncle were accused of murder.

His eyes which had lit up as she entered the room seemed transfixed with horror. Her father a murderer!

Instinctively he recoiled, but it was only for a moment. Then he took her hand in his.

"Poor little Val, this is terrible," he said. "Do you know why I came down today? I was so full of hope. You can guess what it was that I wanted to ask."

For a moment she was silent; her long fringed eyelashes had drooped over her dark eyes. When she lifted them to his face, she said quite simply:

"Yes, I think I know what it was, Paul, but it cannot be now. It was just a dream, you know, and it must end."

"It is no use. There is nothing that can alter my love for you. Now just tell me everything; there may be some way in which I can help you."

Valentine told him all the details, not forgetting to mention that the victim had been accompanied on his journey by a man named Jacques Velizay, who was a foreign buyer for an important Paris house.

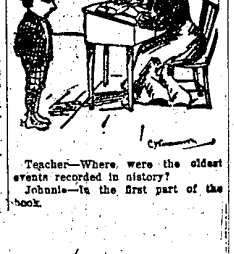
"Well, I'll go to the morgue now," said Paul as he had noted down all that she had to tell him, "and I will do all I can to prove your father's innocence; but whether I can clear your uncle is another matter. How came the victim to be in his garden?"

"Uncle and father are both innocent," cried Valentine. "It is all some terrible mistake; but Paul, I cannot be your fiancee. Your father would never consent to your marrying a girl whose father was accused of murder."

"Valentine, if we are engaged that gives me the right to help. You love me and I love you; do not make things harder by having such absurd scruples. Now good-by sweetheart."

To be continued

AH-HAR.



Teacher—Where were the oldest events recorded in history?

Johnnie—In the first part of the book.