

# SOLVING A RAILWAY MURDER

By George Barton

## Col. James Fraser and His Wonderful Capture of a Crook

**Hurried Investigation, a Trip by Night and Other Mysterious Features Are Inoculated Into Col. Fraser's System of Arriving at Identity of the Criminal Parties—Scene Is Played in an English Station.**

THE time was an evening in July, some years ago, the place the station platform of the North London Railway company at the Metropolitan borough of Hackney. A number of passengers were there, waiting the six o'clock train from London. It arrived presently, with bell ringing clamorously and engine puffing up great clouds of smoke and sparks. The moment the train came to a full stop, a man on the platform made a dash for the nearest railway carriage. He opened the door and entered, but suddenly drew back with a look of alarm on his face and a cry of "murder!" on his lips.

The guard looked and what he saw robbed his tongue of its office. The setting sun sent a golden streak into the coach and the glaring light revealed there on the blue cushions a pool of red blood. The guard and the headwaiter passenger entered together and made a careful examination of the carriage. The man's first shriek had not deceived him. There could be no possible doubt about it. The cushions of the carriage were soaked with human blood. The coach was a walking stick, and a small black leather bag.

The railway carriage was run into its destination and a dispirited instant later Col. Fraser, in the head of the London police force, in the meantime the most persistent cross-questioning failed to throw any light whatever upon the mystery of the blood-soaked cushions. The guard remembered in a hazy sort of way that two men had entered the carriage just before the train left Fenchurch street in London. His impression was that they were together but he had no certain recollection of their appearance. He was totally at sea. He only knew that he had a crowded train that day, and in the hurry and bustle of his work had not attracted attention to the incident.

There was no clue, however, and that was of a character that could not be overlooked even in the density displayed by the railway officials. It was the impression of a blood-soaked cushion on the door of the railway carriage. The first act of Col. Fraser was to order the guilty carriage out of service. He directed that special pains be taken to preserve the impression of the blood-soaked cushion so that it could be referred to when ever the occasion demanded.

That same night word came to police headquarters that the body of a well-known man had been found at a spot where the North London railway passes Victoria park. The man was anonymous but still alive. He was taken to a nearby hospital and all that medical science could do was done to restore him to consciousness, but in vain. He died within 24 hours without saying a word. It was evident from the start that he had been murdered. Unfortunately, his head and face had been beaten so cruelly that he was unrecognizable. Just at a time when the solution of his identity seemed furthest away, the hospital authorities came upon a card in his vest pocket. It read "Thomas Briggs, 10, St. George's Road, Croydon, Surrey."

An officer was at once dispatched to the office of Roberts & Company, in Lombard street. The head of this firm said that Mr. Briggs was their clerk, and one of their most valued employees, and that they were at a total loss to account for his unexplained absence from his post. He had been absent from his banking house for nearly half a century, and it was not till a few days before that he had been reported for work as the clock was striking nine. He failed to do so that morning, and they had assumed that he was lost as they were waiting for him to come to his home a message was received, stating that he had not returned to his house to Hackney the night before. A hurried investigation proved that Mr. Briggs left his home at the usual hour on the previous day, he carried a gold-headed cane and wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and had in his possession a gold watch and chain. After consulting the bookkeeper at the bank he left at the usual hour in the afternoon, and died with his married daughter at Peckham. He returned to the city

time to take the regular train at Fenchurch street for his home at Hackney. That was the last time he was ever seen alive.

It did not take many hours to prove that the unoffending clerk of Roberts & Company and the unknown individual whose body had been found near Victoria park were one and the same person, and that the old gentleman had been brutally murdered for his money. The eye-glasses and the gold watch and chain were both missing. The blood-soaked cushions, the general disorder of the railway carriage, and the imprint of the bloody hand on the door of the vehicle proved that a terrible struggle had taken place before the deed was accomplished. It must have been done very quickly, because the distance from Fenchurch street, from whence the train started, and Hackney was only a matter of three miles. In fact, the deed must have been committed immediately after the train left the city, for the body had been thrown into the bushes of Victoria park, and the murderer had evidently jumped from the train before it reached Hackney station.

But the days went by and there was no result. The newspapers were filled with the details of the crime and there was great public indignation. The old man's friends the coachmen had scattered letters to the London Times in which they implored dramatically whether it was possible for a man to go on a railway journey in the heart of the British Empire without carrying the risk of being murdered. The police hunted under this criticism but still they did not appear to make any progress. Col. Fraser sat in his office day by day and tried to solve the problem. He finally decided that it would be a waste of time to trace the old watch and chain that had been stolen from Mr. Briggs, before it would be possible to trace the man who had carried out the murder. Every policeman on around the metropolis was visited but none of them possessed any jewelry that corresponded to that which had been stolen from the bank clerk in the railway carriage. Col. Fraser was not satisfied with these reports, and determined to personally investigate his inquiries and resources in another direction. He selected the Jewellers of London, and began his work in the locality known as Cheapside.

To his delight he came upon a significant clue within 24 hours. Mr. Graves, a Jeweller in Cheapside, possessed a gold chain which was identical with the one that had been owned by Mr. Briggs. The Jeweller said that he had accepted the chain in exchange for another one which he had given to a foreign looking person who had called at his establishment. To add to the importance of this discovery, it was learned that the exchange of the jewelry had been made on the day following the murder of Thomas Briggs.

The news of this first link in the chain of evidence was widely published in the London newspapers. On the day following, within Col. Fraser's office a gold chain which was identical with the one that had been owned by Mr. Briggs. The Jeweller said that he had accepted the chain in exchange for another one which he had given to a foreign looking person who had called at his establishment. To add to the importance of this discovery, it was learned that the exchange of the jewelry had been made on the day following the murder of Thomas Briggs.

"That's what I am called," some times," was the indignant response. "Well, my name's Holly Smith. 'What do you say, Mr. Smith?' 'I'm a cabman.' 'An honorable vocation,' responded the colonel, with a smile. "I understand you're investigating the murder of Mr. Briggs," said Col. Fraser with all attention. He scanned the man's face carefully and replied: "Yes, I am. Can you furnish me with any information about the subject?" "I don't know," was the response. "But I have a little box here that may interest you." Whereupon he handed Col. Fraser a small box. After consulting the bookkeeper at the bank he left at the usual hour in the afternoon, and died with his married daughter at Peckham. He returned to the city



"THAT'S THE MAN!"

"It belongs to my little girl," was the reply. "Where did she get it?" "It was given to her by a man who lodged with us—his name is Franz Muller. He left very suddenly after the papers had become full of the 'Mystery of the Railway Carriage.' This was now with a vengeance. The cabman was taken in hand and subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. He told about his German lodger and said among other things, that the man had left his photograph on the bureau in the second-story back room where he had lodged. The police immediately secured the photograph and Col. Fraser hastened to Cheapside and presented it to Graves, the Jeweller.

"Did you ever see that man?" he inquired. "I did," was the reply. "He is the foreigner who came here and exchanged the chain on the day after the Briggs murder."

Col. Fraser returned to the cabman's home and held another long interview with the red-faced person who had so providentially furnished him with a clue. The cabby proved to be a veritable mine of information. He testified, among other things, that he had purchased the hat which was found in the railway carriage, being so at the request of Muller; his German housewife's warrant went there next morning; he furnished his residence to a cheap lodger in the Whitechapel district. This was carefully recorded, and Col. Fraser having supplied himself with the most complete information, he at once formulated plans by which two of the shrewdest detectives in the metropolis were detailed to go to America to arrest Mr. Franz Muller, Bobby Smith, the cabman, and Mr. Graves, the Jeweller. Of Cheapside, were sent with the officers for the purpose of identifying Muller. This carefully ascertained quarter immediately went to Liverpool and took the first steamer across the Atlantic. It proved to be the "City of Manchester," which in its day was one of the fastest ocean liners, but which at the present time would be ranked among the slow

creepers. However, the sailing vessel in which Muller took passage was even slower, and it was calculated that the "Manchester" would reach New York some days before the "Victoria." It was an anxious voyage, and the time was counted with feverish impatience; but the expectations of the pursuers were realized and the "Manchester" reached New York more than 48 hours ahead of the "Victoria." The four men waited on the dock, and as soon as the vessel reached the pier, they went aboard. Muller had been quite sick on the way over and he came on deck looking pale and worn. Mr. Graves and the cabman recognized him at once and shouted in unison:

"That's the man!" The two detectives immediately placed him under arrest and before leaving the vessel made a search of the prisoner's box. The watch belonging to the murdered man was found in his trunk, wrapped up in a piece of leather. Most anxious of all Muller, at the time of his capture, was wearing the hat which belonged to the murdered man. It had been cut down and somewhat altered, but there was no difficulty in finding traces which made it correspond to the article of headgear which had been in the family of the victim for many years.

Through the cooperation of the American authorities, extradition papers were speedily prepared and the prisoner went back to England in the custody of his four captives, arriving there in the middle of September of the year of the murder. Although the identification of the prisoner by means of thumb-prints had not been perfected at that time, the first steps taken by the authorities was to secure the impressions of the prisoner's hands. These were carefully compared with the blood-print on the door of the railway carriage, and the marks of the right hand were found to correspond fairly well with the blood-soaked impression on the door of the coach.

The trial occurred at the next session of the general criminal court. Sir Robert Collyer, the solicitor-general, had charge of the prosecution, which was based entirely upon circumstantial evidence. It was charged that Muller had committed the murder under a sudden impulse; that standing at the station he had noticed Mr. Briggs' watch and chain and jewelry, and was filled with an overwhelming desire to possess them; that on the spur of the moment he had determined to follow him into the carriage. The victim related, but his as-

salant determined to possess the valuable, no matter at what cost. He had tried to choke Mr. Briggs into insensibility, and not succeeding in that, had seized hold of a life preserver such as is carried in English railway carriages and had used it to batter in the head of his venerable victim. There was a deep wound over the ear, the skull was fractured, and there were several other blows on the head. Following up this presentation of the crime, the distinguished solicitor-general presented, piece by piece, the bits of evidence which, in his mind, convicted Franz Muller of the murder of Thomas Briggs. Sir Robert Collyer said that it was the strongest circumstantial evidence which had ever been brought forward in a murder case in his time. Muller, on his part, set up an alibi, but it was not very well substantiated, and the jury without the slightest hesitation, returned a verdict of guilty.

After his conviction Muller insisted that he had been forced guilty upon a false statement of facts. His case was taken up by the Society for the Protection of Germans in England, and the most powerful influences were exerted there and abroad to obtain a reprieve for the convict. In the meantime, Muller was urged to make a confession of his crime. He evaded any direct response to this appeal, usually saying, "Why should man confess to man? Man cannot forgive man; only God can do so. Man is therefore only accountable to God." He persisted in maintaining this attitude until the very last. He was not a vicious man in any manner or way, and it was quite evident that his crime was not premeditated, and this fact at the moment caused some uneasiness of conscience to his captors. His refusal to admit his guilt was perplexing and disgusting.

Finally the day of execution arrived. A German pastor attended him to the scaffold and urged him to make his peace with God. The black cap was placed over his eyes, and the rope was adjusted about his neck. The executioner prepared to give the signal which would launch him into eternity. At that psychological moment Muller leaned over and whispered in the ear of his bishop: "I did it." The next second, the drop had slipped, and Franz Muller had gone to meet his Creator. (Copyright, 1924, by W. O. Chapman.)

Highest Altitude in Europe. Madrid has the highest altitude of any city in Europe.

### LAME BACK PRESCRIPTION

The increased use of "Toris" for lame back and rheumatism is causing considerable discussion among the medical fraternity. It is an almost infallible cure when mixed with certain other ingredients and taken properly. The following formula is effective: To one-half pint of good whiskey add one ounce of Toris Compound and one ounce Syrup Sarsaparilla Compound. Take in tablespoonful doses before each meal and before retiring.

Toris compound is a product of the laboratories of the Globe Pharmaceutical Co., Chicago, but it is as well as the other ingredients can be had from any good druggist.

### "CALLING" THE PITCHER.



The captain—See here, you've given seventeen men bases on balls! Dis here's a ball game, not no sid-day walkin' match!

### HANDS RAW AND SCALY.

Itched and Burned Terribly—Could Not Move Thumbs Without Flash Crackling—Sleep Impossible.

Cuticura Soon Cured His Eczema.

"An itching humor covered both my hands and got up over my wrists and even up to the elbows. The itching and burning were terrible. My hands got all scaly and when I scratched, the surface would be covered with blisters and then get raw. The eczema got so bad that I could not move my thumbs without deep cracks appearing. I went to my doctor, but his medicine could only stop the itching. At night I suffered so fearfully that I could not sleep. I could not bear to touch my hands with water. This went on for three months and I was fairly worn out. At last I got the Cuticura Remedies and in a month I was cured. Walter H. Cox, 16 Somerset St., Boston, Mass., Sept. 25, 1904."

Puter Drug & Chem. Corp., Sole Prep. Boston.

Hen Lays Eggs on Table.

A resident of the village of Brighton has a hen which always lays her eggs either on the kitchen table or in the middle of the dining room. It is a peculiarly appropriate place for one of the birds in the house. When the house door is shut and the hen wants to lay an egg, she backs up and forces it under the door is opened.

What If Was.

She was visiting a friend's restaurant the first time and returned under various other things and asked for something the waiter had dropped. She turned her attention to what seemed a dish of parsnips. Puzzling over the combination of ham, parsnips and other ingredients, she suddenly said to her companion: "Why, there's eggs in that!"

Sally, it's the greatest," he replied.

Thankful He Isn't Rich.

John Adams is looking for the highlight of the following paragraph: "I am thankful I am not a millionaire. I do not, however, claim any special credit. It seems to run in the family. I have had the opportunity of being a Crocker family back to the jumping place and find there has not been a wealthy one in the whole bunch, and the records show that there has never been a duke or count who tried to break in the Atlanta Constitution."

The Unexpected.

The judge was about to pass sentence upon the condemned man. "In view of certain extenuating circumstances," he said, "I'm inclined to treat you with leniency." "A valiant woman who was sitting at a little distance suddenly burst into tears."

"Are you the prisoner's wife?" his honor inquired.

The woman could only nod.

"I think that in view of all these mitigating influences," the judge resumed, "I will fix three years."

The valiant woman suddenly gasped, "I ain't half enough justice, it ain't half enough," she wildly shrieked.

### THEN AND NOW

Complete Recovery from Coffee Ills.

"About nine years ago my daughter, from coffee drinking, was on the verge of nervous prostration," writes a Louisville lady. "She was confined for the most part to her home."

"When she attempted a trip down town she was often brought home in a cab and would be prostrated for days afterwards."

"On the advice of her physician she gave up coffee and tea, drank Postum, and ate Grape-Nuts for breakfast."

"She liked Postum from the very beginning and we soon saw improvement. To-day she is in perfect health."

"She has recovered, is a member of three charity organizations and a club, holding an office in each. We give Postum and Grape-Nuts the credit for her recovery."

"There's a Reason." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich. Read "The Road to Wellville" in Postum.

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.