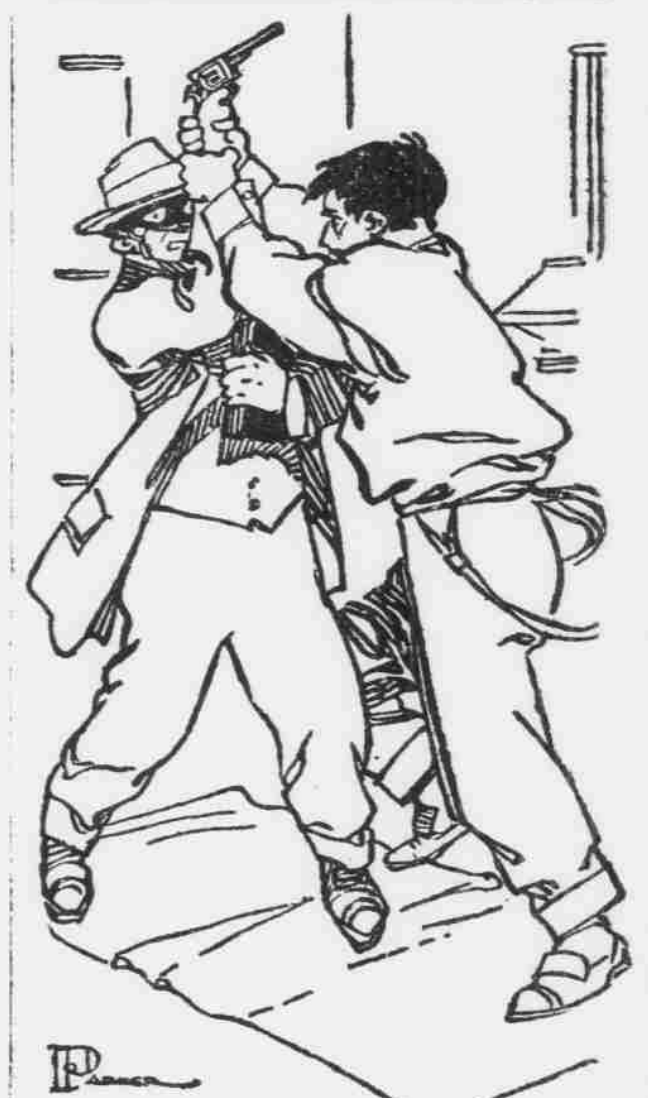


# THE THEFT OF THE EBONY BOX.

A Detective Story Involving Costly Gems and a Cipher.

By HOWARD FIELDING.  
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In the possession of the Olmstead family there was a jewel casket more quaint and curious than any other that I have ever seen, though I have encountered some oddities in that line in the course of nearly thirty years of detective work. It was made of ebony ornamented with silver and measured 9 by 7 inches by 4 in height. There were many peculiarities of the silver inlay, and the design was thought to be highly artistic, but the chief point to be noted here is that the thing ap-



HE CAUGHT HIS RIGHT WRIST. appeared to be solid, even upon the closest inspection.

The hinges of the lid were ingeniously concealed. The line between the two parts was invisible, and the hidden lock was operated by secret springs most cunningly devised. Naturally so strange an object was the centerpiece of many queer stories, which were collected by one of the Olmsteads about sixty years ago and set down by him in manuscript in a leather bound book originally intended to be a ledger. At the end of the book is a very difficult cipher which contains the directions for opening the casket.

But for this cipher the secret would have passed out of the world. A few months ago, when the present head of the family, Mr. Stephen Olmstead, stumbled upon the old book of traditions, the casket itself had been forgotten.

Stephen Olmstead found the casket in a sort of vault in the wall of the country house which his father built in Marchmont twenty years ago, and, having solved the cipher after a protracted struggle which nearly wrecked his intellect (as he informed me), he opened the ebony box and was disappointed because there was nothing in it. He had no reason to expect any discovery of treasure, but he is not the sort of man to be indifferent to the possibility.

He was engaged to Mrs. Clara Holton, a rich and charming widow, with a country house near the Olmstead place. Mrs. Holton's lack of enthusiasm for jewels is conspicuous. She has never been known to wear an expensive ornament. Nevertheless Olmstead had no sooner found the casket than he was possessed with the idea of buying something rare and precious to put into it, ostensibly as a wedding gift.

Accordingly he appeared at his Marchmont home one evening with a dazzling diamond piece of historical as well as intrinsic value, a stomacher that had once been worn by a titled lady of the old world. Miss Sylvia Olmstead, sister of Stephen, ridiculed this purchase when the gawgaw was displayed to her and told Stephen that Clara Holton would divorce him rather than wear it.

"She'll like the casket," said Sylvia. "It's quite in her line. How do you open it?"

The diamonds were already within and the lid closed.

"Couldn't tell you," said Stephen. He put the casket away in the vault and locked the door. Immediately after this they heard some one on the veranda, just outside the windows of the library where the conversation which I have tried to reproduce from their recollection of it occurred. Both supposed that the person on the veranda was George McKellar, a neighbor, and that he was coming to call on Sylvia.

Neither Olmstead nor his sister spoke of hearing the footsteps, for McKellar was a delicate subject with them. Olmstead opposed him as a suitor for Sylvia's hand on the ground that he was not financially sound. McKellar had inherited from his father a business in a rather bad struggle, and he was having a hard struggle with it.

They waited for McKellar to be announced, and one of them was disappointed, while the other was agreeably surprised. Half an hour later McKellar called Sylvia by telephone and told her that he was occupied with business affairs.

It may have been about 1 o'clock

when Olmstead, who was wakeful, heard sounds in the lower regions of the house. He was one of those nervous Yankees who fear everything except danger. A hundred petty anxieties assailed him, including the dread of taking cold, as he grumblingly made his way downstairs.

In the lower hall he listened. Beyond doubt there was some one in the library. Olmstead opened the door and entered. The room was dark save for a feeble, fluttering light which suddenly settled upon Olmstead with a brilliancy that surprised him.

"Throw up your hands!" said a voice.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Olmstead, and he felt about on the wall for the button that controlled the lights. The burglar's lantern revealed it to him, and he instantly made the room bright.

Seeing that Olmstead had no weapon the burglar did not retreat, but took some steps forward, holding his revolver ready in one hand while with the other he clasped the ebony jewel box as a football player holds the ball.

When they were quite close Olmstead sprang upon the man so suddenly and with such skill that he caught his right wrist and held the arm straight up in the air. The burglar let fall his weapon, which made a loud noise on the floor. Olmstead hurled him backward and stooped for the revolver, whereupon the burglar drew another from the side pocket of his coat and fired with a considerable coolness of aim from a distance of about ten feet. The bullet struck Olmstead on the upper edge of the left eyebrow and glanced off. He was stunned, but only for a few seconds. When the servants came running at the noise of the shot their master was already on his legs again and feebly attempting a pursuit of the marauder.

The case was immediately reported to the local authorities. The suburb of Marchmont has a chief of police and twelve patrolmen.

The chief and ten of his men turned themselves loose on the trail of the Olmstead burglar, with no result whatever. The eleventh man remaining in charge of the station house. The twelfth man patrolled old Marchmont village and caught a thief in the bakeshop of Mrs. Sophia Neely, where there was the sum of \$4 in the till. He had effected his entrance through the adjoining barber shop of Gustav Swartz, where there was no money.

Three days later my services were requested by Mr. Olmstead, who was walking about with some plaster over his eye and not much the worse for his adventure.

After hearing his story I was able to give him hope of the rascal's capture, for the description furnished to me was excellent. Its most salient feature was a reddish, brushlike mustache. The burglar's hair was dark brown, but his mustache was undeniably red and not false in Olmstead's opinion.

Singularly enough, this description perfectly fitted the only suspicious character then known to exist within the limits of Marchmont, except the petty thief above referred to, who was smooth shaven. The suspicious character was Gustav Swartz, the barber.

Swartz had borne an excellent reputation until about a month ago, when some silver, stolen from a Marchmont residence, had been found in his shop. The barber said that the parcel containing the silver had been left with him by a customer who was to call for it and that he himself did not know what the contents were, but the story had obtained no credence.

Upon hearing Olmstead's description the local police immediately exhibited Swartz.

"Swartz looks very much like my burglar," said Olmstead, "except that he has a good eye. The other fellow had a bad one. I don't believe Swartz is the man."

The case stood thus when I took hold. That evening, while I was talking with Miss Olmstead and her brother and Mr. McKellar in the library, there came a loud, sudden rap at the window. Olmstead, who was naturally nervous, nearly jumped out of his skin, but he was the first man to reach the window. He raised the curtain and the sash, and by the light that streamed out from the room he saw the ebony box lying on the veranda. The person who brought it had escaped.

Olmstead was overjoyed. As the box showed no mark of violence the diamond stomacher must be in it, and with the anticipation of seeing this treasure again Olmstead's hands shook so that he was fifteen minutes opening the casket. He did not let us see how he did it. The casket was empty.

I will not enlarge upon the mysteries involved in this performance. There was no reason why anybody should have returned the jewel box except upon the belief that the diamonds were in it. I was doubly convinced of this fact after I had persuaded Olmstead to show me the trick of opening the casket.

Somehow my suspicions rested upon Swartz, and I made a searching investigation of the man. I discovered that he had a brother who was a professional thief, no doubt the man who had left the silver with him. This brother was unknown in Marchmont except to Swartz himself, and I could not trace him up until a sudden inspiration came to me.

The petty thief captured in Mrs. Neely's bakeshop had entered Swartz's shop first. The police believed that he had done so to steal and had then passed on to Mrs. Neely's. I had a different theory. I believed that the man had broken into the barber's shop to shave and, being alarmed, had fled through to the other building, not to steal, but to escape.

With this idea in mind I took Olmstead to see the thief. Olmstead could not be sure. He said, however, that

if he had to choose he would identify this man by his eyes rather than Swartz by his mustache.

"They look very much alike," he said, and I had begun to think so, too, though at first I had not seen the resemblance. I made up my mind that this was Swartz's brother, although both Swartz and the prisoner denied it.

At this stage of the investigation I was switched to a wholly new theory by a discovery which was partly accidental. I learned that George McKellar had encountered some sort of good fortune and had tided himself over his difficulty. Where had he got the money?

I asked myself this question and set to work to find an answer. It appeared that he must have raised about \$20,000, which could have been done by selling the stolen diamonds. But the money seemed to have come from a loan by McKellar's bank, although he had already owed the bank an uncasy sum.

It was in the midst of the late money stringency, and I could not believe that the bank had obliged him to that extent. Well, I had a friend inside that bank, as I have in some others, and I learned the facts. A lady unknown to my friend and without McKellar's knowledge had deposited \$25,000 in cash to secure this loan.

This must have been done by some woman from whom McKellar would not accept a loan, and it did not take me long to work down to Sylvia Olmstead. But here I came upon a queer thing. Miss Olmstead was worth about \$150,000 in her own right, but it was chiefly in real estate and very hard to realize money upon in a time of panic—in fact, nearly impossible. I learned that she had raised \$30,000 or thereabouts by a great sacrifice, but she had not succeeded until one week after the \$25,000 had been put into McKellar's bank.

There was no way by which she could have got the money unless she had stolen the jewels from her brother. But how had she opened the casket?

Did she know the secret? In order to test her I arranged a little comedy. I told one of my assistants how the box could be opened in order that he might be able to work with it cleverly in Sylvia's presence while I watched the girl's face. Then we went to the Olmsteads' and held a little session with the brother and sister and McKellar.

I explained that it was absolutely necessary for me to discover whether a person could guess the trick of opening the box. My theories had advanced. I said, to the point where I must have evidence as to the real difficulty of the puzzle. Undoubtedly the thief had been lurking outside the window on the night of the robbery and had seen the jewels put away. He had stolen them in the casket. Could he have got them out of it in a half hour's work?

"Certainly not," said Olmstead. "My friend here," said I, "thinks he can do the trick, and I'd like you to try, Mr. McKellar, and you also, Miss Olmstead."

"I'll wager," said she, "that I can open the box inside of fifteen minutes."

"Nonsense!" said her brother, but Sylvia took the casket, while I held the

watch, and she won, not in fifteen minutes, but in a few seconds.

"There!" she cried and gave the box to her brother.

He uttered a yell like a wild Indian. The diamonds had come back to the ebony casket.

It required no very great penetration to see through this case. Sylvia had learned the secret of the box from the cipher in the old blank book. Desperately anxious about McKellar's affairs, she had striven to raise money to help him secretly, since he would not have accepted open aid from her. But she saw that she would never get the money in time to save him.

The jewels had inspired her with a wild idea. She had taken them as soon as her brother was safely upstairs—borrowed them, let me say, for she put them in pledge and raised the money to redeem them at the earliest moment.

Barber Swartz's brother stole an empty box and was nearly a murderer for the sake of it. After shaving in his brother's shop he was suddenly alarmed, and he fled, leaving the box behind him. His brother found it next morning, and as he was a thoroughly honest fellow he returned it.

Of course with the discovery of the jewels my work ceased.

THE DIAMONDS HAD COME BACK.

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**BRICK WORKS**  
H. L. GRANT & SON PROPRS.  
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CAPACITY 1,000,000 PER MONTH  
HIGHEST QUALITY  
PROMPT SHIPMENT  
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If you want to feel well, look well and be well, take Foley's Kidney Remedy. It tones up the kidneys and bladder, purifies the blood and restores health and strength. Pleasant to take and contains no harmful drugs. Why not commence today? J. G. Hall.

When it comes to buying wedding presents for him it is extremely doubtful if all the world loves a lover.

There are many imitations of DeWitt's Carbolyzed Witch Hazel Salve—DeWitt's is the original. Be sure you get DeWitt's Carbolyzed Witch Hazel Salve when you ask for it. It is good for cuts, burns and bruises, and is especially good for Piles. Sold by all druggists.

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Mothers—Have you tried Hollister's Rocky Mountain Tea? It's a great blessing to the little ones, keeps away summer troubles. Makes them sleep and grow. 35c. Tea or Tablets. J. G. Hall.

The women of Texas are said to be rapidly falling into the ranks of the advocates of vote for women.

Cures Blood Skin Diseases Eczema  
Greatest Blood Purifier Free.

If your blood is impure, diseased, not or full of humors, if you have blood poison, cancer, carbuncles, eating sores, scrofula, eczema, itching, risings and bumps, swellings or suppurating sores, scabby, pimply skin, ulcers, bone pains, catarrh rheumatism, or any blood or skin disease, take Botanic Blood Balm (B. B. B.) Soor All sores, heal aches and pains stop and the blood is made pure and rich. Druggists or by express \$1 per large bottle. Sample free by writing Blood Balm Co., Atlanta, Ga. B. B. B. is especially advised for chronic, deep-seated cases of blood or skin diseases, as it cures after all else fails. Sold in Oxford, N. C. by J. G. Hall's Drug Store.

The person who talks about others may as well realize that others are talking about him.

Sometimes you may be told that there are other things just as good as DeWitt's Kidney and Bladder Pills for ailments of the kidney or bladder, which always result in weak back, backache, rheumatic pains, rheumatism and urinary disorders. All these ailments are cured by DeWitt's Kidney and Bladder Pills. It is sufficient to convince you how good they are. Send your name to E. C. DeWitt & Co., Chicago, for a free trial box. They are sold here by all druggists.

### Mortgage Sale of land.

Under and by virtue of a deed of trust executed to me by James M. Howell, which said deed of trust bears date Feb. 10th, 1908, and is duly recorded in book 70, page 100 of the records of deeds of Trust of Granville county, default having been made in the payment of the debt secured by said deed of trust, I will on

MONDAY, AUGUST 16th, 1909,  
sell to the highest bidder for cash at the court house door in Oxford the following described tract of land: In Fishing Creek Township, beginning at a dead pine, Elizabeth McGehee corner, and running thence to the mill path west, then down said path to a white oak at foot of the hill, thence to the creek, thence down the creek to the mill path, thence by said line to the beginning, containing 65 acres, it being the same land devised to said James M. Howell by his grand father J. M. Howell (see will book 21, page 137 in office clerk Superior Court. Time of Sale, 12 m. Terms cash; This July 12th, 1909. A. W. GIBBAM Trustee.

### Land Sale

By virtue of an order of the Superior Court of Granville county in a certain special proceeding pending therein, entitled W. T. Farabow and others, against Jesse Farabow and others, I will sell by public auction on the premises near stem Depot on

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14th, 1909,  
at 2 o'clock p. m. the D. C. Farabow home place which was the dower tract of the late E. C. Farabow, containing 170 acres more or less. Said tract of land adjoins the lands of W. E. Sten on the north, H. A. Sten on the east, John Hopkins, Will Gooch, Dr. Hardy and O. E. Bullock on the south, and Gideon Bullock and Frank Bullock on the West, and will be offered in three tracts as follows: A 40 acre tract west of the railroad, a 50 acre tract on the south of the home place and an 80 acre tract including the residence of the said D. C. Farabow, but said land will afterwards be offered as a whole and sold the way it brings the most. This is very fine tobacco land and only a few hundred yards from the stem High School. Terms one-third cash and the balance in six and twelve months.

W. T. FARABOW, Com'r.  
A. A. Hicks, Atty. July 14th, 1909.

**CR. DR.**

### DR. AND CR.

A few words to the wise  
ON ELECTRICAL SUPPLIES.  
Time is money—do you realize how much time can be saved by using up-to-date appliances? We carry a full line of time and labor saving.

ELECTRICAL DEVICES.  
We employ skilled workmen to install any of the electrical conveniences in your house. Our charges are moderate both for material and work. A call at our store will be both interesting and profitable to you.

**Starnes & Usry**

**The National Bank of Granville.**

Capital - - - - - \$60,000.00  
Surplus - - - - - \$34,000.00

**Appreciation.**

This Bank values the business it receives from its customers and takes every opportunity of telling them so. Our customers on the other hand appreciate the fact that the service extended to them is coupled with security. Any business arrangement to be permanent must be mutually satisfactory and profitable. Therefore, in the selecting of your bank, have permanency in view and establish yourself for your present and future well-being with a good sound bank.

**E. T. WHITE, H. G. COOPER, W. T. YANCEY,**  
President. Vice-President. Cashier.

REPORT OF THE CONDITION OF

## THE CITIZEN'S BANK,

At Creedmoor,

In the State of North Carolina at the close of business June 23rd, 1909.

**RESOURCES.**

Loans and discounts.....	\$ 52,100.72
All other stocks Bonds and Mortgages.....	1,500.00
Banking house and Furniture and Fixtures.....	3,000.00
Demand Loans.....	1,500.00
Due from banks and bankers.....	13,457.13
Cash Items.....	555.12
Gold coin.....	195.00
Silver coin, including all minor coin currency.....	309.75
National Bank notes and other U. S. notes.....	5,212.86
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$ 78,708.69</b>

**LIABILITIES.**

Capital stock.....	\$10,000.00
Surplus and Profits.....	2,000.00
Undivided profits, less current expenses and taxes paid.....	324.56
Dividends unpaid.....	14.00
Notes and bills rediscounted.....	7,000.00
Time Certificates of Deposits.....	28,315.85
DEPOSITORS subject to check.....	18,815.82
Due to Banks and Bankers.....	2,222.49
Cashiers checks outstanding.....	91.57
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$ 78,708.69</b>

State of North Carolina, County of Granville, ss:  
I, I. E. Harris, Cashier of the above named bank, do solemnly swear that the above statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
I. E. HARRIS, Cashier.  
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 26th day of June 1909.  
J. R. Singleton, Notary Public.

Correct—Attest:

L. D. EMORY, S. C. LYON,	S. W. MINOR, Z. E. LYON,
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Directors.

**THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK,**  
**OXFORD, N. C.**

**Are You Ready**

for the financial opportunities that will come to you? Good credit or ready cash—Money saved—is needed to seize them.

**Your Money**

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**Insure Your Future**

by opening an account with the good old bank and adding to it regularly. The First National Bank; Oxford, N. C. is one of the foremost financial institutions of the State.

**It Pays**

4 per cent. interest on Savings Deposits. Call to see us, we'll tell you all about it.

**DIRECTORS**

E. H. Crenshaw, R. W. Lassiter, W. J. Long	J. H. Gooch, Z. W. Lyon, R. S. Usry	E. C. Harris, C. G. Royster
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**W. H. HUNT, Cashier.**