

My Own Murderer.

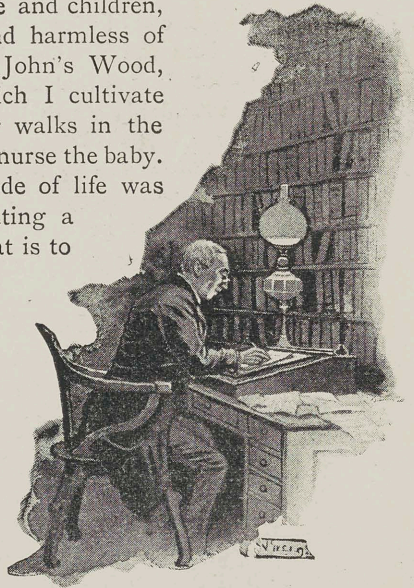
BY E. J. GOODMAN.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. GREIG.

WHEN I say that my name is Samuel Chillip, of course you will know who I am. Yes, I am the author—it has been said the famous author—of “The Poisoned Waterbottle,” “Steeped in Gore,” “The Demon Detective,” and other highly sensational and blood-curdling stories. But though these tales of mine have brought me some fame and a fair amount of profit, I am not particularly proud of them. I really don’t know how I, so to speak, drifted into crime. I never liked it, and, of course, never practised it myself. I would much rather have written sentimental or moral stories, but I seemed somehow fated to turn my attent’ on to fraud and violence, and I could not get away from such subjects.

I am a family man with a wife and children, and live the most domesticated and harmless of lives. I rent a small villa at St. John’s Wood, and have got a pretty garden, which I cultivate myself. I take my children out for walks in the Park, and have even been known to nurse the baby. Never was there a man whose mode of life was so different from his mode of getting a living. I burn the midnight oil, that is to say, I do my best work at night. The cares of a large family distract me so much that I can never concentrate my attention on my plots and situations in the daytime. It is only when the wife has retired, and the children, the darlings! are put to bed, that I can sit down quietly and develop my deeds of darkness.

Nothing out of the usual course had happened on the memorable evening of which I am about to tell, and which was destined to have so marked an influence on my literary career. I had had tea with my beloved Seraphina and our six children at seven o’clock, and afterwards we all sat



“I BURN THE MIDNIGHT OIL.”

round the fire, and I told stories—stories not of crime and cruelty, but of good fairies and enchanted princesses, of boys and girls at school, and innocent loves and faithful lovers, which always started with “once upon a time,” and ended with “happy ever after.”

During the evening my little flock gradually melted away till nothing was left of it but my dear wife and our eldest girl, aged fourteen. At ten o'clock we supped off cold roast pork and rice pudding, with a little mild ale as a beverage, and then my beloved ones kissed me, wished me good night, and left me to my labours.

By half-past ten I was hard at work in my study, deep in the most critical chapter of my new story, “The Chemist's Revenge.” I rather prided myself on the originality of the crime committed in this thrilling tale. The wicked hero had invented a hideous pill, compounded of ingredients which would explode within a human body and blow it to atoms. And now I was approaching the terrible scene in which the fatal dose was about to be administered to the hapless victim.

It was a quiet night; there was not a breath of wind even to stir the trees out of doors, and all was still within, save when a coal fell from the fireplace into the grate and the clock on my mantelpiece chimed the hour. Midnight had just struck, when my ears were suddenly startled and my heart set beating by a sound out of doors. It was that of a slow, heavy step, crunching the gravel of the garden path and coming nearer and nearer to my door. And then the footsteps ceased, and there was a knock—a single knock.

If I had made the flesh of my readers to creep in my time, now it was the turn of my own. No one had ever visited me before by night in this way. I could not imagine who it could be or what he—for it was the tread of a man that I had heard—could want.

I turned cold and shivered. But a moment's thought told me that after all it might be only a policeman, suspecting burglars, come to inquire why my light was burning, or it might be a “mistake.”

So I went to the door and opened it without removing the chain.

“Who is there?” I asked.

Then a voice inquired, “Is this Mr. Samuel Chillip's?” It was a somewhat hoarse, gruff voice, but its tone was subdued and quiet. It threatened nothing unpleasant.

“Yes, I am Mr. Chillip,” I said.

“Can I speak with you a moment?”

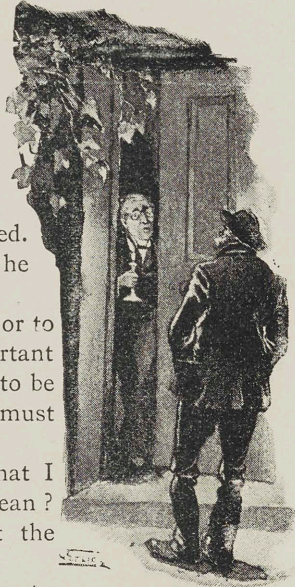
"About what? Who are you?"

"I am a stranger, and I cannot well explain my business here, but it is important and urgent."

This was said in so tranquil and respectful a manner as to allay any apprehension I might have felt, while exciting my curiosity. Still I hesitated. The stranger might be a beggar. But he anticipated my thought.

"I have not come to beg," he said, "or to trouble you in any way. I have an important communication to make to you, likely to be useful to you in your occupation, and it must be made at once or it will be too late."

Here was a mystery equal to many that I myself had invented. What could it mean? I was eager to know, and alas! let the stranger in.



W. P. W.

He asked me to

allow him to accompany me to my study, and I did so. There was but a dim light in the passage, and it was not till he had entered my room, and the rays of my lamp had fallen upon him, that I discovered what manner of man it was that I had rashly admitted.

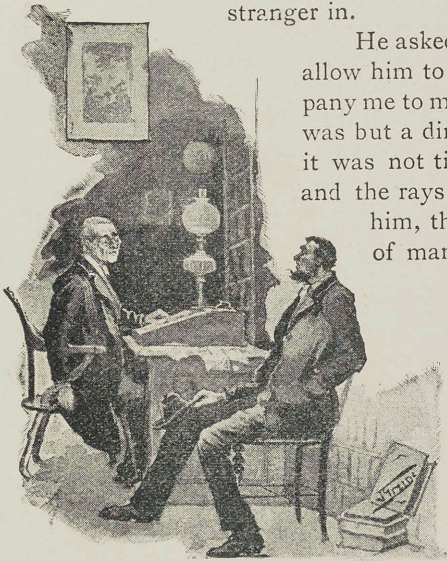
"WHO IS THERE?"

He was a tall, big man, with a hard, square face, and deep-set, glittering eyes, and his chin fringed with a round, shaggy beard, while he was attired in a rough pilot coat, and on his head he wore a broad-brimmed felt hat. He looked like a seafaring man,

and was not a prepossessing person.

I asked him to take a seat, and seated myself in my round-backed writing chair beside my desk.

He had taken off his hat, and held it on his knee with his left



"HE WAS A TALL, BIG MAN."

hand, while the other he buried in his capacious side pocket. I thought he was going to produce something, but he did not.

He merely opened a conversation, and I may say that the tone of his voice throughout was always as quiet, as calm, as subdued, as when he addressed me at the door.

"You are Mr. Samuel Chillip?" he asked, or remarked, again. I bowed in reply.

"The author of 'The Poisoned Waterbottle' and other stories?"

"Yes."

"Tales of crime?"

"You may call them so."

"What do you know of crime?"

The question startled me. In the first place, it was an extraordinary one to ask under the circumstances, and in the next, it was not an easy one to answer.

"May I inquire," I said, "why you put this question?"

"Because I wish to know."

"For what purpose?"

"That you will discover presently."

The man had evidently an object in view, so I thought I would humour him.

"I have taken great interest in the subject," I said, "and have studied it in books and newspapers and in the courts of justice, and have also derived a good deal of information from persons who have come in contact with criminals."

"Ah! you know nothing of it from personal experience?"

"How do you mean?"

"You never, for instance, saw a murderer?"

"Only in the dock."

"Would you *like* to see a murderer?"

"Well," I replied, with a nervous laugh, "'like' is hardly the word. If I happened to come across such an individual, I should feel interested, no doubt."

"No doubt," this strangest of strangers echoed, adding, after a pause, "and you never saw a murder done?"

"Never."

"Would you *like* to see a murder done?"

This gruesome question almost startled me out of my chair.

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed, "certainly not."

"And yet you write about such things."

"That is quite a different matter. But you must excuse me

for saying that I do not understand the object of these questions. May I ask who you are?"

"I am a murderer."

My visitor said this in the calmest way, as though he were only calling himself a clerk or a carpenter.

"A murderer?" I gasped rather than asked.

"A murderer in intention only at present. I am going to do a murder, and I want you to witness it."

Good heavens! I looked at the stranger; I met his terrible wild eyes, and in a moment it flashed upon me that I was in the presence of a madman.

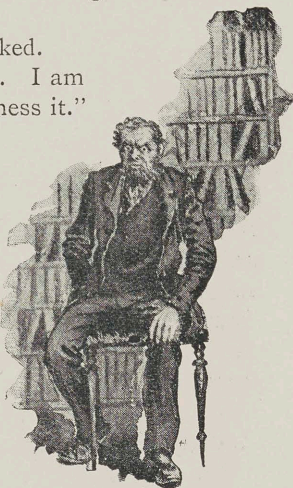
I started from my chair, and was about to rush to the bell and call for help, but the stranger put his left hand on my shoulder and kept me in my seat, while he drew his right hand from his coat pocket, and something glittered in the lamplight. Oh, horror! a bright, new, large, six-chambered revolver!

"Be still, be silent," he said, almost in a whisper, "or you are a dead man."

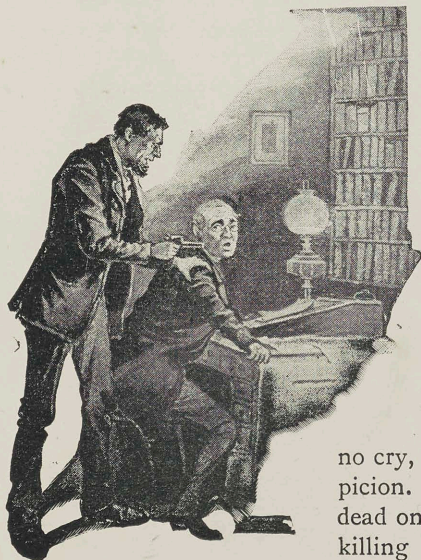
I need hardly say that I was quiet enough after this, and sat grasping my chair arms with both hands, and staring at the stranger, perhaps with my hair standing on end.

"I don't want to hurt you," the dreadful man went on, "unless I can get nobody better to kill. But I mean to kill someone to-night, and I want you to see me do it. You must come with me out into the streets, and go about with me until we find somebody worth killing. You must keep very quiet, utter

no cry, give no alarm, excite no suspicion. Otherwise I shall shoot you dead on the spot. I would not mind killing you, the author of so many



"I AM A MURDERER."



"SOMETHING GLITTERED IN THE LAMPLIGHT."

stories of crime, but I would rather slay someone of higher social position, and leave you to live and record the deed."

I reflected that I should prefer this arrangement myself, but, still better, I would rather get out of the whole horrible business altogether. But the madman, as I regarded him, was imperative.

"Put on your hat and coat and come with me quietly," he said. "Make no noise or I fire."

It was a frightful situation, such as I had never conceived even in my wildest dreams, but what was I to do? In silence I attired myself for this terrible expedition. My companion made me precede him to the street door, opened it himself, and closed it quietly behind us.

Side by side in silence we walked, the maniac keeping half a step in my rear, and I knew all the while that he had his right hand in his side pocket. Now and then he indicated the way we should go, and then he led me across the Regent's Park, and so through street after street till we reached Hyde Park Corner. We passed several policemen by the way, but, unfortunately, none of them suspected or even particularly noticed us. I dared not give an alarm or attract attention, for did I not know that that dreadful hand was still in that dreadful side pocket?

Presently my companion paused, and said, as though speaking to himself:

"A member of the Royal Family would be best."

I was rather glad to hear this, because if he intended that an illustrious personage should be his victim he was likely to be disappointed. Royal Highnesses are not usually found walking about in the neighbourhood of their palaces at two o'clock in the morning.

Thus we rambled to and fro near Buckingham and St. James's Palaces and Marlborough House, need I say with no result? Not a single Prince was to be seen anywhere, and my companion seemed slightly disgusted.

"Hum!" he muttered. "They are hiding. Let us go now to Downing Street."

He evidently thought that, failing Royalty, his next best course would be to slay a Cabinet Minister. But neither the Premier nor any of the Secretaries of State happened to be abroad at that hour.

Our walk down Whitehall proving uneventful, the madman next suggested that we should "try the Houses of Parliament." Here the position seemed more dangerous. The House of

Commons could not have long adjourned—it was in the days of late sittings—and it was quite possible that some belated M.P. might be on his way home.

Presently, indeed, my companion made a remark that filled me with horror.

“That looks like one,” he said. “Now steady.”

An elderly, respectable-looking gentleman was approaching us, walking alone from the direction of the House, and my terrible associate was standing under a lamp-post still with his hand in his pocket.

My presence of mind, together with my faculty of invention, here happily came to my aid.

“Stay,” I whispered; “mind what you are about, or you will make a mistake. That is not a member of Parliament. I know him by sight but not to speak to. He is a retail grocer who keeps a shop in Oxford Street.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Quite.”

And so the elderly stranger passed us, little guessing what a narrow escape he had had.

The position was truly appalling. Now we neared the Royal Academy, at that time still situated in Trafalgar Square, and my would-be murderer muttered something about “picking off” an R.A. or an Associate. The wretched creature seemed well up in honorary titles. Next we wandered along the Strand, and he thought of destroying a distinguished actor, but the theatrical profession had doubtless long since gone to bed. Thank goodness he had not gone far



“THAT LOOKS LIKE ONE.”

into the heart of Clubland, or he might have found there a victim worthy of his murderous weapon.

On, on he led me, past Temple Bar, not without an eye for wandering Judges and Queen's Counsel. Fortunately, at that hour, it was now about four a.m., the newspapers had all gone to press, and there were no eminent journalists about. Then he came to St. Paul's, and talked about archbishops, bishops and canons, and I almost laughed at the idea of our meeting a Church dignitary abroad at such a time.

Finally, we got into the heart of the City, and here I felt safe if he had any designs on the Directors of the Bank of England or members of the Stock Exchange.

It was in the middle of the deserted road opposite the Mansion House that he stopped at last, and cast a fond look at the residence of the Lord Mayor.

"He won't come out," he murmured; "none of them will, the cowards. Not even an alderman."

Then, after looking about him for a time—why, oh! why, were not the suspicions of some policeman excited by our strange proceedings?—he suddenly exclaimed,

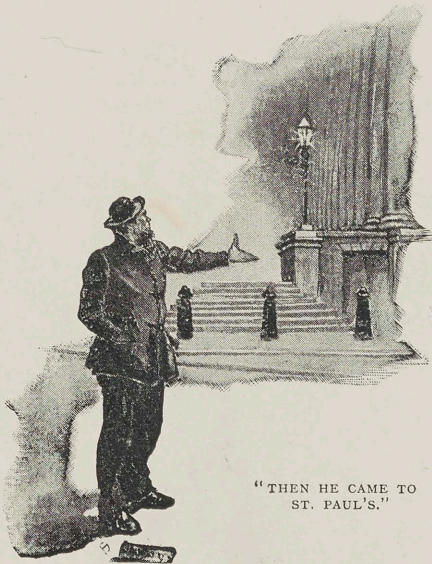
to my great joy :

"I am afraid it is no good. We shall have to give it up for to-night; they are all in hiding, every one of them. To be sure, I might pick off some stranger, and take my chance, but it is hardly good enough. I should waste myself."

This was the pleasantest speech he had yet made, but his next was not so agreeable.

"After all," he said, turning to me, "I don't think I could get anybody better than you. You are a rather distinguished novelist, and the fact that you write stories of crime would make it sound remarkable. What do you say?"

I was almost too frightened to say anything. I was trembling all over, for in a moment that dreadful hand might leap out of that dreadful pocket, and my fate would be sealed. But, happily, my imagination once more came to my aid.



"THEN HE CAME TO
ST. PAUL'S."

"It is not a bad idea," I replied; "but I think you could do better. Don't be in a hurry—there are plenty of distinguished people about, but not at so late an hour as when you called on me last night. Come a little earlier to-night, say at ten o'clock, and we'll see if we can't find a Prince. I know them all by sight, and will point one out to you, a good one. Of course, if you can't get anybody better, you can shoot me."

"Thank you," he said, and for the first time he drew his hand out of that horrible pocket of his, and grasped my own. "It is a good idea. To-night then it shall be, at ten o'clock. Good morning."

I could hardly believe my senses when I saw the dreadful creature slowly making his way towards Cheapside. But, indeed, my senses were failing me. I turned giddy, and staggered against a lamp-post, where presently I was found by a wandering policeman.

I put my hand to my throat, for I felt choking.

"Stop him, stop him!" I cried. "He has got a revolver—he is a murderer—he——"

But the miserable constable took no notice of my warning.

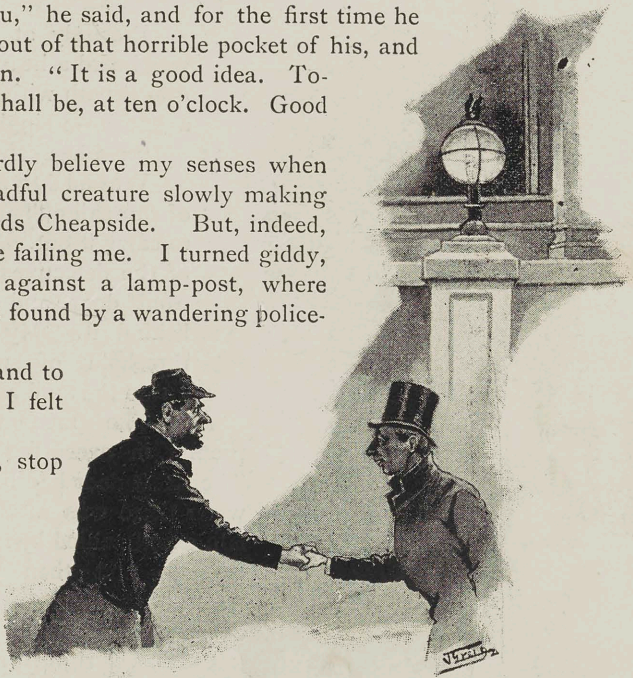
He only took me by the arm, and, turning his bull's eye and a suspicious glance upon my countenance, said:

"Here, you had better go home quietly, sir. I suppose you have been dining out rather late. Hi, hansom!"

And he bundled me into a cab, and took my name and address, and the next moment I was bowling along on my road to St. John's Wood.

It was nearly six in the morning when I arrived, and, fortunately, no one heard me when I let myself in with my latch-key.

My wife thought I had only been sitting up extra late at my



"'THANK YOU,' HE SAID."

work, and I told her nothing of my night's adventure. But I summoned two able-bodied detectives to my aid, and they agreed to await with me the lunatic's second visit. My family supposed that the detectives had come to assist me in getting up a tale of crime, and I did not undeceive them. So I despatched them to bed at an earlier hour than usual, on the plea that I did not wish to be disturbed, and sat with my companions in the study watching for the madman.



"YOU HAD BETTER GO HOME
QUIETLY, SIR."

Precisely at ten o'clock there was heard a heavy footstep on the gravel path without, and once more a knock—a single knock.

"He has come," we whispered.

We had duly arranged our "plan of campaign," and now proceeded to carry it out. The most stalwart of the detectives was to open the front door, and the other to hide behind it. My post was on the threshold of my study, where I was to stand as a "reserve."

The men were wonderfully prompt in executing their operations. The street door had hardly been opened when there was a scuffle and a heavy fall, accompanied by much growling and cursing, and then the unmistakable sound of the snapping of a pair of handcuffs.

"It's all right," said the detective who had been behind the door, "we have got him and his six-shooter too."

Whereupon he produced the very weapon with which the maniac had threatened me—the large, bright, new revolver. I identified it at once.

"I got it out of his side pocket quick as thought," said the man.

Good! And now I retired into my study while the other detective brought the stranger forward.

"What the devil are you fools about?" I heard him cry, as he entered, handcuffed, at the door.

The sound of his voice startled me. It was *not* that of my

visitor the night before. A single glance showed me that it was quite a different sort of person.

"Halloa!" I cried, "there is some mistake here. That's not the lunatic."

"Lunatic!" exclaimed the captured man, "I should think not indeed. It is you who are the lunatics. I am a policeman!"

And a policeman he was—in plain clothes. He had come to tell me that the maniac was dead. He had shot himself almost immediately after leaving me, and the constable who had put me into a hansom remembered my words and my name and address. Hence I was now summoned to give evidence at the inquest.

Of course the policeman was easily pacified, and, indeed, regarded his rough treatment by two of his own colleagues as a joke rather than otherwise.

I duly gave evidence at the inquest, but I am sorry to say that when I told my story it was not listened to quite so gravely as I thought it ought to have been.

So altogether this adventure rather disgusted me with the occupation I had hitherto been following, and now, for some time past, instead of composing tales of crime, I have gone in for writing moral stories for boys.



"THERE WAS A SCUFFLE."