



**Gilbert Keith Chesterton**

*The Scandal  
of Father Brown*



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## THE MIRROR OF THE MAGISTRATE

James Bagshaw and Wilfred Underhill were old friends, and were fond of rambling through the streets at night, talking interminably as they turned corner after corner in the silent and seemingly lifeless labyrinth of the large suburb in which they lived. The former, a big, dark, good-humoured man with a strip of black moustache, was a professional police detective; the latter, a sharp-faced, sensitive-looking gentleman with light hair, was an amateur interested in detection. It will come as a shock to the readers of the best scientific romance to learn that it was the policeman who was talking and the amateur who was listening, even with a certain respect.

“Ours is the only trade,” said Bagshaw, “in which the professional is always supposed to be wrong. After all, people don’t write stories in which hairdressers can’t cut hair and have to be helped by a customer; or in which a cabman can’t drive a cab until his fare explains to him the philosophy of cab-driving. For all that, I’d never deny that we often tend to get into a rut: or, in other words, have the disadvantages of going by a rule. Where the romancers are wrong is, that they don’t allow us even the advantages of going by a rule.”

“Surely,” said Underhill, “Sherlock Holmes would say that he went by a logical rule.”

“He may be right,” answered the other; “but I mean a collective rule. It’s like the staff work of an army. We pool our information.”

“And you don’t think detective stories allow for that?” asked his friend.

“Well, let’s take any imaginary case of Sherlock Holmes, and Lestrade, the official detective. Sherlock Holmes, let us say, can guess that a total stranger crossing the street is a foreigner, merely because he seems to look for the traffic to go to the right instead of the left. I’m quite ready to admit Holmes might guess that. I’m quite sure Lestrade wouldn’t guess anything of the kind. But what they leave out is the fact that the policeman, who couldn’t guess, might very probably know. Lestrade might know the man was a foreigner merely because his department has to keep an eye on all foreigners; some would say on all natives, too. As a policeman I’m glad the police know so much; for every man wants to do his own job well. But as a citizen, I sometimes wonder whether they don’t know too much.”

“You don’t seriously mean to say,” cried Underhill incredulously, “that you know anything about strange people in a strange street. That if a man walked out of that house over there, you would know anything about him?”

“I should if he was the householder,” answered Bagshaw. “That house is rented by a literary man of Anglo-Roumanian extraction, who generally lives in Paris, but is over here in connexion with some poetical play of his. His name’s Osric Orm, one of the new poets, and pretty steep to read, I believe.”

“But I mean all the people down the road,” said his companion. “I was thinking how strange and new and nameless everything looks, with these high blank walls and these houses lost in large gardens. You can’t know all of them.”

“I know a few,” answered Bagshaw. “This garden wall we’re walking under is at the end of the grounds of Sir Humphrey Gwynne, better known as Mr. Justice Gwynne, the old judge who made such a row about spying during the war. The house next door to it belongs to a wealthy cigar merchant. He comes from Spanish America and looks very swarthy and Spanish himself; but he bears the very English name of Buller. The house beyond that... did you hear that noise?”

“I heard something,” said Underhill, “but I really don’t know what it was.”

"I know what it was," replied the detective, "it was a rather heavy revolver, fired twice, followed by a cry for help. And it came straight out of the back garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne, that paradise of peace and legality."

He looked up and down the street sharply and then added:

"And the only gate of the back garden is half a mile round on the other side. I wish this wall were a little lower, or I were a little lighter; but it's got to be tried."

"It is lower a little farther on," said Underhill, "and there seems to be a tree that looks helpful."

They moved hastily along and found a place where the wall seemed to stoop abruptly, almost as if it had half-sunk into the earth; and a garden tree, flamboyant with the gayest garden blossom, straggled out of the dark enclosure and was gilded by the gleam of a solitary street-lamp. Bagshaw caught the crooked branch and threw one leg over the low wall; and the next moment they stood knee-deep amid the snapping plants of a garden border.

The garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne by night was rather a singular spectacle. It was large and lay on the empty edge of the suburb, in the shadow of a tall, dark house that was the last in its line of houses. The house was literally dark, being shuttered and unlighted, at least on the side overlooking the garden. But the garden itself, which lay in its shadow, and should have been a tract of absolute darkness, showed a random glitter, like that of fading fireworks; as if a giant rocket had fallen in fire among the trees. As they advanced they were able to locate it as the light of several coloured lamps, entangled in the trees like the jewel fruits of Aladdin, and especially as the light from a small, round lake or pond, which gleamed, with pale colours as if a lamp were kindled under it.

"Is he having a party?" asked Underhill. "The garden seems to be illuminated."

"No," answered Bagshaw. "It's a hobby of his, and I believe he prefers to do it when he's alone. He likes playing with a little plant of electricity that he works from that bungalow or hut over

## THE THREE TOOLS OF DEATH

**B**oth by calling and conviction Father Brown knew better than most of us, that every man is dignified when he is dead. But even he felt a pang of incongruity when he was knocked up at daybreak and told that Sir Aaron Armstrong had been murdered. There was something absurd and unseemly about secret violence in connection with so entirely entertaining and popular a figure. For Sir Aaron Armstrong was entertaining to the point of being comic; and popular in such a manner as to be almost legendary. It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr. Pickwick had died in Hanwell. For though Sir Aaron was a philanthropist and thus dealt with the darker side of our society, he prided himself on dealing with it in the brightest possible style. His political and social speeches were cataracts of anecdotes and "loud laughter"; his bodily health was of a bursting sort; his ethics were all optimism; and he dealt with the Drink problem (his favourite topic) with that immortal or even monotonous gaiety which is so often a mark of the prosperous total abstainer.

The established story of his conversion was familiar on the more puritanic platforms and pulpits, how he had been, when only a boy, drawn away from Scotch theology to Scotch whisky, and how he had risen out of both and become (as he modestly put it) what he was. Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles, at the numberless dinners and congresses where they appeared, made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist. He was, one felt, the most seriously merry of all the sons of men.

He had lived on the rural skirt of Hampstead in a handsome house, high but not broad, a modern and prosaic tower. The narrowest of its narrow sides overhung the steep green bank of a railway, and was shaken by passing trains. Sir Aaron Armstrong, as he boisterously explained, had no nerves. But if the train had often given a shock to the house, that morning the tables were turned, and it was the house that gave a shock to the train.

The engine slowed down and stopped just beyond that point where an angle of the house impinged upon the sharp slope of turf. The arrest of most mechanical things must be slow; but the living cause of this had been very rapid. A man clad completely in black, even (it was remembered) to the dreadful detail of black gloves, appeared on the ridge above the engine, and waved his black hands like some sable windmill. This in itself would hardly have stopped even a lingering train. But there came out of him a cry which was talked of afterwards as something utterly unnatural and new. It was one of those shouts that are horridly distinct even when we cannot hear what is shouted. The word in this case was "Murder!"

But the engine-driver swears he would have pulled up just the same if he had heard only the dreadful and definite accent and not the word.

The train once arrested, the most superficial stare could take in many features of the tragedy. The man in black on the green bank was Sir Aaron Armstrong's man-servant Magnus. The baronet in his optimism had often laughed at the black gloves of this dismal attendant; but no one was likely to laugh at him just now.

So soon as an inquirer or two had stepped off the line and across the smoky hedge, they saw, rolled down almost to the bottom of the bank, the body of an old man in a yellow dressing-gown with a very vivid scarlet lining. A scrap of rope seemed caught about his leg, entangled presumably in a struggle. There was a smear or so of blood, though very little; but the body was bent or broken into a posture impossible to any living thing. It was Sir Aaron Armstrong. A few more bewildered moments brought out

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