WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS

ABOUT the middle of this century public interest in the game of chess received a remarkable impetus from the arrival in London of a man named Greet, a Jew from Poland, who brought with him an automatic chess-playing figure. This figure had been first exhibited at Prague some six months before, and its subsequent tour of the great cities on the continent of Europe had excited an extraordinary interest. Most of the best- known masters of the game had taken up its challenge in St. Petersburg, Paris and Vienna, but one and all had suffered a defeat, inexplicable in its suddenness and completeness.

Mr. Greet now announced that his figure was ready to play against, and beat, any one in England who should care to oppose it. The Automaton (for this was the name that the public had given to the figure) was exhibited a number of times in London, and on each occasion a crowded and mystified audience witnessed the uncomfortable spectacle of an image made of wood and iron defeating in an easy and masterful manner several well-known exponents of the

most difficult game in the world. The machine consisted of a large figure of wood, roughly hewn and painted to resemble a man. It was about twice the size of a full-grown human being, and when playing was seated in a chair made on a very open design. It was quite motionless, except for the jerky movements of its arm and of the two long steel pincers that served it for fingers. It made no sound save the one word "Check," that rasped out from its wooden throat, and the final "Check-mate," pitched in a higher and more triumphal key.

This soulless machine was a master of all the known gambits, and seemed to play them with a supreme inspiration not granted to any living professor of the game. Public excitement about the matter was acute, and speculation ran high as to the probable methods employed to bring about so marvellous a result. Every facility was afforded to the public for inspection. Before and after each game the figure was opened in full view of those among the audience who might care to come up on the stage, and the closest scrutiny revealed nothing but a mass of cogs and wheels, among which it was quite impossible for a man to be concealed. Moreover, Mr. Greet was quite willing to allow the Automaton to be moved about on the stage at the direction of its opponent, so that the theory of electrical communication with a player concealed beneath the platform, had to be abandoned by those who had conceived such an opinion.

During the games, Mr. Greet sat or walked about on the stage, but two members of the audience were always accommodated with chairs by the chess table, and it was obvious that there could be no communication between the figure and its proprietor. In this way the public mind

became unpleasantly harassed, and Mr. Greet's purse grew to a comfortable fulness with the entrance money of the hundreds who blocked the door at each performance. The uncanny nature of the whole affair attracted numbers to the spectacle who did not even know the moves of the game, and many a man set steadfastly to the learning of chess and the baffling of the problems proposed in the weekly papers, that he might better comprehend the nature of the mystery that was puzzling London.

So with a *clientèle* composed of professors and amateurs of the game, engineers and scientists, and the great General Public that loves a mystery, Mr. Greet might have remained in London for a long period of great pecuniary satisfaction. Then, without any warning, it was announced in the papers that the Automaton had made its last move, for the present at any rate, in the metropolis, and would shortly set out on a tour through the principal towns of the provinces.

Birmingham, Manchester and all the great centres of the North and Midlands were visited with the usual triumphs, and one morning the public were startled at their breakfast-tables with the brief announcement that Mr. Greet would back his Automaton against any chess player in the world for £2,000 a side, the match to take place in the Theatre Royal at Bristol within three weeks' time.

NO one had been more completely mystified or more intensely amazed at the triumphal progress of the Automaton than Mr. Stuart Dryden, considered by most people to be the leading chess player in England. He had himself refrained from hazarding his reputation in a contest with the thing, for, after carefully watching the easy defeat

of those noted professors who had been bold enough to put its skill to the test, he had been forced to confess that in this machine, by some unfathomable means or other, had been placed an understanding of the game that he could not hope to compete with. He felt, however, that a time must come when he would be obliged to court the defeat that he knew to be certain, and the growing nearness of the contingency embittered every day of his life. He worked ceaselessly at problems of the game, and studied with the greatest care the records of the matches that had been played against the Automaton, but he found it quite impossible to coax himself into the least degree of self-confidence.

Professor Dryden was a bachelor, possessed of a small regular income, which he had always supplemented largely with his earnings at chess by way of stake-money and bets. He was a man of solitary habit and lived much alone in a small house in the north-western quarter of London. An old woman attended to all his wants; he was surrounded by a large and complete library, and between his little house and the St. George's Chess Club he spent almost the entire portion of his life. It was his custom to rise early every morning, and after a long walk in the Regent's Park to arrive at the Chess Club about noon. There, as a rule, he stayed till about ten o'clock of the evening, when he would return to a quiet supper and several hours with his books.

On the morning that Mr. Greet's announcement had been made public to the world, he left the house very early indeed, before the arrival of the daily papers.

On this morning he was in an exceptionally bad temper. He was by nature a sullen man, and the continued triumphs of this Automaton, that

pointed to a probable reduction in his income, had been gradually making him more and more sour. Then, to complete his misery, he found last night on his return from the club, that by the failure of a company, considered sound by the most sceptical, his small private means had been reduced almost to a vanishing point. All night long he had been sleepless with anxiety, and as he tramped the Regent's Park this morning his head burnt feverishly and his heart was very bitter against the world. The glorious freshness of the morning kindled no spark of happiness in his morose mind, and the children who met him stalking along the paths ran nervously from his dour expression. He examined the future with care, but could see nothing but ruin before him, as what now remained of his private income would be quite insufficient for his support. Moreover, in confident expectation of a successful season at the chess-table, he had of late allowed himself many extravagances, and his creditors were beginning to put unpleasant pressure upon him. Several tournaments, from which he was confident of gain, had been put off, since all interest was centred in the Automaton, and a mere contest between man and man felt tame after the almost supernatural strife with Mr. Greet's image. Poor Mr. Dryden was unable to compose his ruffled temper or to suggest to himself any plan for the future, and wearying of the monotonous greenness of the park he turned his steps towards the club, though it was much earlier than he was wont to go there.

The St. George's Chess Club was a temple sacred to the upper circles of chess-players. The social or financial position of a member mattered little, but it was essential that he should be a real expert in the practice of the game. In this way a

very motley and cosmopolitan gathering was usually to be found in the comfortable club-house situated in an inexpensive street near Hanover Square.

Mr. Dryden walked straight upstairs to the smoking-room, and was astounded to find it, usually so empty in the morning, quite crowded with an excited throng of members. All of those present had attained or passed the middle age of life. Every face carried some strongly-marked personality, and a rapid conversation was being earned on in different languages.

Mr. Dryden was inexpressibly annoyed. He had promised himself peace and had found chaos, and his ugly face assumed a still more repulsive expression. He looked the very embodiment of friendless old age; a sour, tired old man whose death would conjure a tear from no single eye.

A little Frenchman was the first to notice Dryden's entrance. He leapt to his feet and waved his hand towards him.

"*Tiens*, Dryden!" he exclaimed; "*voilà nôtre sauveur*."

The babble of the room stopped at the words, and all faces turned to the door. The old man stood there, slowly furling his umbrella and looked enquiringly round. Then he spoke slowly.

"You will pardon me, gentlemen, if I do not quite understand. Why saviour, and of what?"

"Why, *our* saviour! We're going to try for Greet's dollars," drawled a voice from the corner. "You're the only man for us. We'll put up the chips."

"Once more I am at a loss," said Mr. Dryden; "M. Laroche and Mr. Sutherland, you have puzzled me. I presume you are talking about the

The very embodiment of friendless old age.

only Greet that interests us. What new thing has he or his Automaton done?"

Twenty members shouted the explanation, and, half smothered in newspapers, Mr. Dryden was forced into a chair, and formally asked if he would act as representative of the club and take up Mr. Greet's challenge.

"It has beaten all the rest of us," said the President sadly, "but surely in the first chess association in Europe there must be one player who can get the better of that infernal machine. There *shall* be one, and you shall be that one, Dryden. You can take a line through this. I know by exactly how much you are my master, and that thing showed about the same superiority over

me. So you'll start about square. This is the scheme we've arranged. The club finds all the money if you lose. If you win, you take half and we pocket the rest. That's fair enough, is it not?"

Mr. Dryden did not take long to decide. However sure he felt that he was no match for the mysterious intelligence that guided the hand of the Automaton, the temptation of the money, and his own straitened condition left only one course possible to him.

"I accept," he said; "make all arrangements in my name, and let me know time and place and anything else that may be necessary. For these three weeks I will shut myself up. If there is anything about the game that I do not already know, perhaps in this absolute seclusion I may wring it from my brain. I suppose that I shall see you all, or most of you, on the appointed day. *Au revoir*, gentlemen. I thank you very much for the honour you have done me."

The members rose in a body, a motley crowd of all nations, each one greatly excited, and congratulations in every tongue smote on the back of Mr. Dryden's head, as, shielded by the President, he walked sedately down the staircase.

LEFT to himself, he set out in the direction of Charing Cross, for he entertained the notion of paying a visit to an old friend in the country. This gentleman, the Rev. Henry Druce, was incumbent of a village cure in Kent, and though his name was unknown to the public, he enjoyed among the professors of chess a high reputation as a master of the game. In the seclusion of Mr. Druce's peaceful vicarage Mr. Dryden felt sure that he would find rest for his worried brain, and

valuable suggestions for the work that he was to do.

The train wandered happily out of the suburbs into the pretty county of Kent, and after many tiresome waits drew up at last at a tiny wayside station, all white in a gorgeous setting of many-coloured flowers. The glare of the sun's rays that beat back from the glowing platform into Mr. Dryden's tired eyes staggered him for a moment, as he stepped out of the gloom of the carriage. The hot, quivering atmosphere was very distinct to the eye, like the hot-air waves that one sees above a shaded lamp. The country was full of dull, murmuring noises, and among them the voices of the porters and the rumble of the train seemed indefinite and unreal.

Mr. Dryden was unable at once to assimilate himself to the new surroundings, and long after the train had banged over the points and glided away into the haze he still stood looking vaguely over the broad fields, scattered with lazy cattle, that lay against the railway on the other side. He was startled into consciousness by a voice asking if he wished to travel on the omnibus that was about to start for the village. Following the man to where, in the dusty road, a boy in a big straw hat was lazily flicking the flies from the two sleepy horses that stood dejectedly in front of the little yellow omnibus, he was presently jolting into view of the scattered houses of the hamlet. The vicarage was an old-world house in an old-world garden, and as Mr. Dryden walked up the white-flagged path to the porch, he was afforded a view of Mr. Druce, comfortably disposed for his afternoon nap in a long chair by the window. The vicar was, however, delighted at the intrusion, and very excited by Mr. Dryden's tale of Greet's challenge and his own acceptance. They talked

for a while about the mysterious figure and its inexplicable victories, till suddenly Mr. Druce, who throughout the conversation had been somewhat hesitating and shy of manner, turned to his visitor and said:

Comfortably disposed for his afternoon nap...

"It appears to me that in London you have ceased in a measure to enquire into the reason for these wonders. You are beginning to accept the victories of the Automaton as inevitable, and to believe, I am amazed to find, that the thing is in reality an almost supernatural triumph of science. Now surely, Dryden, you cannot think that that steel hand is guided by any other than a human intelligence. It is absurd; you might just as well believe in magic and the black arts. I have not seen it, but I read, and am told, that facility is

given to the audience for examination; that it is opened, and is apparently empty of aught save machinery; that it is detached from the stage or its chair; in fact, that its secret is so clever that everyone has been baffled. Now it is quite plain to me that somewhere, either inside it, or close at hand, is a man, possibly unknown to us all, but obviously a chess player of extraordinary brilliance, who by some means or other plays the Automaton's game. That is quite certain. The problem is, therefore, who is the man? The names and the movements of all the great players are known to us through the papers. I can tell you in a minute where is Iflinski, or Le Jeune, or Moore. Besides, there are not half-a-dozen men in the world who could have played the games so far recorded. Now I have a theory. I am a good Christian, I believe, both by profession and practice, and I have hesitated long in my mind before I was compelled to believe in this theory of mine. It brings me to think evil of a man who has been my friend, and were I not so certain, Dryden, I would never breathe it to a soul. You are the first to hear. Listen. Of course, I long ago gave up the supposition of a wonderful scientific discovery, or anything of that sort. Since then I have simply been trying to find out the man. I have compared the games played by Mr. Greet's figure with those played by most of the greater living masters, and I have found in one case a striking similarity. Even then I should not have spoken had not coincidence aided me still further; had not, in fact, my friendship for the man I suspect enabled me to follow his movements and be privy of his disappearances. It is—and am grieved that he should have lent himself to such a deception—Murray."

Mr. Dryden gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Murray!" he said, "Philip Murray of the Queen's Library, the bibliophile, the old white-haired gentleman who comes sometimes to the club and plays a game or two. I can hardly believe it, Druce."

"It was hard for me to believe it myself," said Mr. Druce, "and I have only told you half of what I know. In my mind the truth of the thing admits of no doubt. I will tell you more of my proofs."

"But the man couldn't have done it," broke in Mr. Dryden; "he couldn't have beaten these men, he couldn't have played the games. I've seen him playing in the club, he is no extraordinary player. No, Druce, find some one else for the spirit of the Automaton."

"Don't be so impatient, and don't be led astray by the idea of Murray's incapacity," said Mr. Druce. "You don't know him properly, neither you nor any one else at the club; but I do. He cares nothing for notoriety. Chess is his recreation, not his business; but I can tell you, Dryden,—and many hundreds of games have Murray and I played together,—that he is the first master of the game in England. Enough for his ability. Listen to these facts. How long ago is it that the Automaton was first exhibited in Prague? Eight months exactly. At that time Murray disappeared from England and was absent for six months, precisely the length of time that Greet was taking his figure through the big cities of Europe. The fact alone of his disappearance may be only a coincidence, but look at this. My sister Lizzie's husband is at the Embassy in Vienna. She saw Murray three times in the streets during the time that the Automaton was there. She mentioned the fact in a letter to me, because, she said, he seemed to avoid her in so strange a manner. Tom Rollit, writing from Antwerp, told

me how he met Murray in a *café*, and how constrained he seemed. The day was the second day after Greet and his figure had begun their matches in that city.

"I didn't pay much attention to this at the time. But after the Automaton had come to London, and I had repeatedly called on Murray to have a chat about the thing, and been as often told that he was away, I became suspicious. He is a man who has all his life been most reluctant to leave his home, and after the first time that in my study of the games I had noticed a resemblance between Murray's play and that of the Automaton, my suspicions became very strong. It was then that I remembered his several journeys to Europe just before his long absence. He has always professed an extra distaste for continental travel. I remember, too, how I had met Edouard Roulain, the man who has had such an extraordinary success in Berlin as a *prestidigitateur*, in the hall of Murray 's house on the occasion of one of my visits. When I asked him about the man—for I should like to have met him—he changed the subject at once and somewhat rudely.

"Again—it is really wonderful how so much circumstantial evidence has come my way—he was in Manchester when the Automaton was there. I was calling, and I could not help noticing that the maid who showed me to the drawing-room carried a letter, addressed in his handwriting, that bore the postmark of that town. Mrs. Murray put the letter quickly in her pocket, and when I asked her where her husband was, she told me that he had gone to Edinburgh about a book. You must agree with me, Dryden, that that is enough. Well, I've got one last proof—the most conclusive of all.

"When they went to Birmingham, I followed and took a room that commanded a view of the stage-door of the hall. All day long I sat in that window, concealed by the curtains, and every day, sometimes only just before the show, sometimes two or three times during the day, I saw a man, heavily bearded and with spectacles, walk into the hall, with Murray's walk. Once I saw him with Greet, but generally he was alone. That that man was Murray I have no doubt at all. He is the brain of the Automaton. Philip Murray has worked one of the biggest deceptions on the world that has ever been conceived, and I doubt not he has nicely feathered his own nest in the working of it. What do you think of my story?"

"I own that I am fairly astounded," said Mr. Dryden, "and I cannot think how it is done. I tell you I have looked inside the thing, from both sides, and it's full of wheels. I've pushed it about the stage; and I've sat there during the play and never taken my eyes off it."

"Did Greet let you put your hand inside and touch the machinery," said Mr. Druce.

"Well, I never thought of doing that, nor, when I come to think of it, did any one else; but I saw wheels, and cogs and springs, as distinctly as I see you."

"That can be arranged by an elaborate system of mirrors, some improvement on the Pepper's Ghost idea. Edouard Roulain is quite clever enough to fool any one by a trick of that sort. It's my belief that Murray gets inside it, I don't think it could be worked by any other means. I expect that the plot was conceived somewhat after this fashion. Edouard Roulain, in the course of his investigations, stumbled on a really exceptionally brilliant idea for an optical delusion. It then

occurred to him that this idea might be put to more profitable use than mere exhibition. How he hit on the notion of the chess-playing Automaton, I can't think. He has been a friend of Murray's for some time, I found that out; and very likely he told Murray of his find and asked for suggestions. Murray may have got it from some old book, or perhaps thought it out himself. Wait a minute though, I never told you how I proved Roulain's connection with the affair. When the Automaton was in London, I met him repeatedly about the town; but that was before I was so sure about Murray, and I didn't think much of it. He had grown a moustache, but I recognised him easily. I daresay he's gone now, he wasn't in Birmingham."

"What about Greet?" said Mr. Dryden.

"Oh, he is only a figurehead; perhaps he doesn't even know the secret. He has been an operatic manager all over Europe and the States; he took Roulain to New York when he made his first great success there. He is about the best business manager they could have."

"Well, I suppose I must grant you that Murray does work it—exactly how he does it doesn't matter much. What I want to think out is, how does this knowledge help me? Suppose that you or I give the thing away, what do we gain? Have you thought of doing it yourself?"

"No, I have not. To tell you the truth, I have rather been enjoying the joke, and were it not for my orders, I should have in time thrown down the gauntlet myself. If there is one man in England who knows Murray's play, it is myself, and I think I might have got the better of him. The feeling of mystery that has surrounded the Automaton has helped him immensely; he would

not have had so complete and easy a success if his opponents had not been frightened out of their best game. I could see that by studying the records of the play. As it is, I shall do nothing; but if this knowledge will be any help to you in your game, you are most heartily welcome to it. Believe me that I shall so far escape from my seclusion as to be a most interested spectator of the match at Bristol."

"I am immensely obliged to you, old friend," said Dryden; "I will make it no secret from you that I am in a very bad way for money. A totally unlooked-for misfortune has deprived me of the greater part of my regular income, and the interest that has followed this Automaton has caused several of the important tournaments, that I should have made money out of, to be abandoned. If I can win this match, I get £1,000, which will set me straight, and from my victory I shall gain a reputation that will put me in the way of much future gain. If I were to write a book on chess, it would enormously enhance its sale."

"I am sorry to hear of your distress," said Mr. Druce, "which I had never suspected, and I am the more glad that I may be of a little use to you. You will stop to dinner, of course, and before you go I will give you the records of a great many of Murray's games. He has had enough of his mysterious triumph, and it is quite time the joke came to an end."

Dinner was quiet and pleasant, and though the presence of Charles Cunliffe, the curate, who was fresh from Magdalen, and cared for nothing except stamped leather bindings and the fine embroidery of a cope, excluded chess from the conversation, the three men found the subject of continental travel a convenient exchange for opinions. Mr. Cunliffe had in undergraduate days

paid several visits to Boulogne, and held elaborate ideas on the subject of racial distinctions.

Mr. Dryden bade farewell to the two clergymen in the little station, now cool and pleasant in the moonlight, and during the seventy minutes of his journey to Charing Cross, examined feverishly the bundle of papers that Mr. Druce had given him.

FOR the next week he kept himself strictly from the world and held unceasingly to his task of investigating Mr. Murray's methods. At the end of that time there came to him the conviction that he had met his master. As before he had known that the uncanny spirit of the Automaton would surely beat him, so now he realised with a pain—all the worse because it swept away the hopes that Mr. Druce's story had inspired—that in the brain of the little old Scotch librarian was the same power, none the less real now that it had lost its odour of mystery.

Meanwhile his creditors had become more insistent in their demands, and poor Mr. Dryden, crushed with despondency and overwhelmed with debt, conceived a hatred towards the automatic figure and its inmate that increased in bitterness as each day brought him nearer to the contest which he felt certain would prove his Waterloo.

FOR the three weeks he kept entirely to his own house and held no communication with the outside world, except for a short correspondence with the President of the club on the matter of the challenge, and the arrangements for day and hour. He received one short letter from Mr. Druce, wishing him good fortune and assuring

him that he would be among the audience to watch the downfall of the Automaton.

Whatever mistrust of his powers he might entertain, it was not his own money that he would sacrifice by abandoning the match, and in the interests of the club he was bound to go through with the affair.

FOUR days before the match he came to Bristol and took apartments in a house in the Hot-wells, that faced the river. The coming match had aroused extreme interest in the town, and crowds were continually assembled about the station at Temple Mead, in hope of a prior view of the Automaton.

The coming match had aroused extreme interest in the town.

On the day after his arrival he sat for many hours at the window, watching the tall spars of the ships show stark against the cliffs as the vessels were towed to and from the city. The chatter of the riverside loafers that reached his ears treated always of the Automaton, and the improbable speculations that were hazarded brought a weary smile to his face. About sunset he left the house, and, following a winding path, climbed the edge of the gorge, coming out upon

the Clifton Down. For a little while he sat there, watching the silent beauty of the scene. The dying sun had lent a greater glory to the city that sloped from the sides of its seven hills to the hollow beneath him, and the Avon traced a line of rosy flame through the gorge, till it lost itself at last in a forest of masts and the dull smoke-cloud ol the furnaces. Then the sun seemed to grow in size and rush quicker to its bed. For a moment it hung over the Somersetshire woods, firing every tree into a glory of a moment. Then it was suddenly gone, and the white coolness of evening came directly over the country and the town. The majesty of hill, champaign and valley, lent an infinite composure to the trouble of Mr. Dryden's thoughts, and presently he began to take the road to the city, purposing a cheerful dinner at some inn. A merry party of travellers filled the coffee room at the "Greyhound" in Broad Mead, and their amusing conversation about the Automaton induced Mr. Dryden to disclose his identity. He became the centre and hero of the party, and two hours passed with a pleasant speed.

ABOUT nine o'clock, a little rosy with wine, he set out on his way homewards. The mischance of a random turning led him from his proper road, and presently he came out upon the open space of the Queen's Square. The comfortable freshness of the air invited him to stay, and he sat for some time upon a convenient seat. He had come into a pleasant reverie, in which the Automaton played more the part of a comedian than of the villain, when a rumbling noise lifted his eyes to the roadway. A large cart of the strangest conceivable shape, somewhat like the body of a grand piano set upon its edge, was being driven past. It swung round the corner that led to the theatre, which

was close at hand, and he heard it clatter for a little over the cobbles before it came to a sudden stop.

He had a strong idea that this must be the arrival of the Automaton, and without quite knowing why he did so, got up and followed. On reaching the theatre he saw the cart drawn up a little beyond it. He hesitated to go nearer, and then noticed that the gallery door stood a little upon the jar. In a pure spirit of adventure he pushed it back and made a difficult progress down the long dim-lit passage and up the dark rickety staircase. When a plump of cold air upon his face told him that he had won the entrance into the body of the house, he made his way delicately to a seat and sat awaiting possibilities.

He was not long in suspense before he heard distant voices and a considerable noise of a heavy body being advanced over rollers. Then a light came out from the wings and went across the stage. It seemed a tiny speck of flame in the great blackness of the theatre, lighting little save the face of the man who carried it. Mr. Dryden made out a heavy moustache and concluded at once that this must be Edouard Roulain. The man stooped and lit a few of the centre footlights, which turned a square patch of light on the stage.

A hand-lamp was burning in one of the wings, but through the rest of the house the darkness thickened backwards till it wrapped the gallery, in which Mr. Dryden sat, with an impenetrable gloom. Presently the noise of rollers began again, and two men came into the patch of light, pushing the great painted figure of the Automaton. One, a person of ostentatious figure, he recognised immediately as Greet, and with a thrill of excitement he realised that the other, a little bearded man of a peculiar gait, could be

none other than Murray himself. The language of the three men was deadened by the distance, but he saw that the one whom he supposed to be Roulain was busied about the mechanism of the figure. When the clicking of the wheels stopped, Mr. Murray walked up to the figure and spoke a few words to Greet and Roulain. Mr. Dryden could not hear distinctly, but a loud laugh came from the two men on the stage. Then Mr. Murray took off his coat, opened the Automaton and stepped inside it. Presently its arm began to move and the steel pincers of its fingers to shift about on the table.

He was only inside for a few minutes, and as soon as he reappeared, Mr. Dryden, in the fear that they might make it a business to see to the closing of all doors, began to fumble his way out of the theatre. Providentially the door of the gallery entrance was still open, and when he had gained the street, he hid in a doorway a few yards distant from the stage entrance. The men were talking as they came out, and he recognised Murray's voice at once. "That will be all right, Greet," it was saying; "you had better come and see me in the morning. I am staying in Bedminster—42, Leigh Road; it's across the river, you must take the ferry."

They passed down the road, and when they had gone out, of sight, Mr. Dryden began his journey back to the rooms in the Hot-wells.

THOUGH nothing had been revealed to him that he had not been already cognisant of, the fact of having been with his own eyes privy to the secret of the trickery, made him greatly excited. He was conscious of a distinct hatred for Mr. Murray that he had not before experienced. There was something of jealousy in his anger. He bitterly

grudged the old librarian his invention of the Automaton and the money that was coming to him from its exhibition. If he could only beat it, he thought, and then the dreadful feeling of hopelessness, that had left him during the varied excitements of the last few hours came back and beset him with redoubled force. The much-needed repose of sleep was denied him, for all through that night the nightmare figure of the Automaton was with him in his dreams, and when, late next morning, he left his bed, his face was drawn and haggard and his mind a maelstrom of hatred and despair.

THE day was very wild for the season, and continual thunderstorms gathered and broke their fury about the crags ol the Avon Gorge. Mr. Dryden did not leave the house, but watched from his window the thunder-clouds drive through the funnel made by the cliffs, and scatter over the houses and fields beyond. He felt a companionship in the ill-humour of the elements, and the shrieking of the wind played a fantastic accompaniment to the bitter theme of his thoughts. Hatred of Murray was echoed in every scream of the gale, in every splash of the driven rain against the window-panes, while the roaring menace of the thunder fashioned his anger into an ever-growing self-confidence.

All through the afternoon, as the rage of the storm grew stronger his spirits rose higher, and at dinner a brilliant idea came to him. He would surprise Mr. Murray in some quiet place on his way to the theatre, and make known to him his discovery or the trick. The knowledge that the secret was out, coming to him at so critical a moment in the career of the Automaton must, he felt sure, have a deterrent effect on Mr. Murray's

play, while his own knowledge that within the painted figure his invisible rival was uneasily fearful, would lend a confident strength to himself.

The prospect of meeting the spirit of the Automaton in the flesh awoke other possibilities in his mind, and at first he cursed himself for not having conceived a plot for the kidnapping of his antagonist. However, it was now too late, and he dismissed the idea with the reflection that even had he thought of it before he could have with difficulty found trustworthy accomplices. About half-past seven he set out for the meeting that he promised himself. The gloom of the day had in no way abate I and it was already quite dark.

What he had overheard of Mr. Murray's conversation with Greet suggested the river ferry to him as an advisable place, and there, about eight o'clock, he commenced to wait. The match was to be played at 9.30, and the doors were not open to the public till half-an-hour before that time, so he judged it quite certain that Mr. Murray would start for the theatre some time between eight and nine.

The loneliness of the place lent horror to the storm, but Mr. Dryden cared little for the drenching rain or the flaming lightning as he staggered against the wind to keep his post by the ferry. Some twenty minutes had gone when a vivid flash lit the surrounding scene into half-a minute's uncanny radiance, and he saw the figure of a man detach itself from the black shadow of the houses and come to the top of the river bank. Then all was dark again. The wind blew him the sound of a familiar voice shouting for the ferryman, and through the noise of the gale he seemed to recognise the rasping intonation of the Automaton's "Check."

A lighted doorway gave up another figure carrying a lantern, and he could just see the two grope their way down the greasy flags that led to the boat. The tide was nearly at its lowest, and long oily rolls of mud sloped from the roadway on either side to where the last of the ebb hurried on its race to the sea. The power of the current made the crossing a long one, and he could only see the intermittent twinkle of the lantern through the rain. For a long way it moved slowly up the stream and then edged gradually back towards the opposite landing-place. There was a grating noise, the chink of a coin, and Mr. Dryden saw the figure of a man that limped a little come laboriously up the difficult path. He waited in the shadow, and when Mr. Murray came full into the light of the lamp that marked the ferry-place, stepped forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Ah. Murray," he said, "we are well met; for though this evening brings us another meeting, I had rather I found you here. I have a matter to discuss with you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the other, in a voice that shook with ill-repressed astonishment. "You have made a mistake. I do not know you, nor is my name Murray. I beg you will excuse me, I am about a business that presses."

"Don't be foolish, Murray," said Mr. Dryden. "I tell you I recognise you; you've as much time as I have for a talk."

"Again, sir, I repeat that you are wrong," said the other. "I am not Murray, and your interference is impertinent. Good night."

"Oh, you aren't Murray, aren't you; you think to face it out," said Mr. Dryden; "but I know you, you fraud. What about these?" And, making a rapid step forward, he caught at his companion's

beard with both hands. It came away at once, jerking the spectacles with it. They fell and shattered on the pavement.

"Now are you Murray?" shouted Mr. Dryden in a voice of passion, "Damn you, you shall own it! I've found out all about you and the Automaton trick, and I've come here for a little business talk. If you'll only be sensible, we can soon come to terms."

"You have discovered my identity and you have me at a disadvantage," said Mr. Murray. "What do you want of me? Tell me quickly, for the time presses."

"There can be no match till I come, so you needn't hurry," said Mr. Dryden. "Listen. I must have that money, and it's just possible that you may beat me. I didn't come here to threaten, only to frighten you out of your play by discovering my knowledge. It was your refusal to acknowledge yourself that gave me the idea. Now here is my proposal. You let me win, and I say nothing; beat me, and I expose you. An exposure would cost you a lot more than the £2,000 you lose to me."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Murray; "you make a great mistake if you think you can bully me. I had known you, Mr. Dryden, as a gentleman of good manners and repute. I am sorry to find out my mistake. You may do your worst, prove the trick if you can. Now let me pass."

"You refuse then; well, you shan't go. Curse you, Murray, I must have the money. Don't struggle or I shall hurt you. Oh, you will, will you? Take that, then."

Swinging his heavily-mounted stick, he struck the old librarian a crushing blow behind the ear.

The old man fell headlong, and, rolling over, came upon the mud slope. Down this he began to slide, gathering force as he went, till Mr. Dryden, who was watching, aghast at his action, saw the stream catch the feet and swing the whole body round into the river. For a second the face showed white above the black water. Then it was gone into the darkness.

The face showed white above the black water.

For a short time Mr. Dryden stood thinking. He found to his astonishment that he knew no

remorse. One thought alone possessed him; that now he must win the match and the money. The conditions of the game distinctly stated that, should the figure make no move, the victory went to its opponent.

He gathered up his victim's hat, and the false beard, from where they lay on the ground, and stuffing the dripping hair into the hat, flung it out over the river. Then he turned and walked quickly towards the theatre.

MR. GREET and Monsieur Roulain arrived at the theatre a few minutes only before the time appointed for the match. Roulain unlocked the door of the Green Room, which had been reserved for their private use, and they went in to find the Automaton ready seated in its chair. They both concluded at once that Mr. Murray, as was his habit, had arrived earlier and was already concealed within the figure. Roulain contented himself with opening the outer panels, in order to mike sure that his invention of mirrors revealed nothing to the public but the accustomed mass of machinery. When he was satisfied he rapped twice upon the back of the figure, and after a few seconds an answering knock came back to him. It was the signal he had arranged with Mr. Murrav. Then, summoning two attendants, he had the Automaton wheeled on to the stage. Directly afterwards the curtain was raised, discovering to the audience, that thronged every corner of the house, the solitary figure of the Automaton in its chair. Mr. Greet stepped forward to its side, his comfortable figure resplendent in an evening suit that glittered with jewels, and after bowing unctuously in response to the plaudits that rang out, made a little speech in which he recapitulated briefly the conditions of the match.

He finished with the usual invitation to the audience to come on the stage and examine the figure. This ceremony was quickly disposed of. People throughout the country had come to accept the mystery of the Automaton, and flocked to the performances merely as amateurs of a new sensation, without seeking to further probe the secret. Some score of folks chiefly of the lower middle class, sought the nearer view that the Mage afforded, and after Mr. Greet had courteously delayed the over-inquisitive fingers of a countryman from Clevedon, he retired, to appear again with Mr. Dryden.

Mr. Dryden, whom the action of the storm had reduced to a condition of unhealthy dampness, appeared in a spare suit of Mr. Greet's, which hung upon his angular figure in a succession of unexpected creases and folds. The audience, unprepared for this clement of the grotesque, mingled their applause with a ripple of merriment; but Mr. Dryden, in whom the conflicting emotions of triumph and fear waged an incessant battle, was entirely unconscious of any influence outside his own brain. He bowed to the house and cast a look of surveyal across the floor and round the tiers. In a box that overlapped by some feet on to the stage, sat Mr. Drace, a little hidden by a fold of curtain, the ample contour of his face creased into a twinkle of expectant merriment. Mr. Dryden paid him a mechanical salute and then became conscious of Mr. Greet's voice proffering an introduction to two gentlemen of the press who were to occupy seats upon the stage. He shook hands with the politeness of habit and sat down amid a silence of attention, so great, that the concerted breathing of the audience came upon his ear with a distinct and regular ebb and flow of sound.

The mood of simple curiosity with which former spectators had watched the Automaton's triumphs was on this occasion changed to an intense fervour ol interest that threatened in many rases to lapse into hysteria. When on former occasions competitors had climbed the platform, like yokels at a village fair sheepishly certain of defeat from the professional wrestler, the public had speculated pleasantly on the probable duration of the contest, and been content to laugh and wonder at the unusual spectacle. But this was no matter of a lightly-accepted challenge, or of an end which admitted of no serious contemplation. Here were two thousand pounds a side at issue, and the picked chess-player of Kngland set down to do battle for fame and fortune against the all-conquering intelligence of the wooden sphinx.

Mr. Dryden sat, his wrists resting lightly upon the edge of the table, gazing intently into the calm features of his lifeless *vis-à-vis*.

The thing was immeasurably unpleasant.

Little attempt had been made to conceive more than the roughest image of man. The forehead sloped backwards, and the long crooked nose that rose above thin tight-set lips and a hard chin had a flavour of the American Indian, while the whole aspect of the morose, seated figure, one arm clasped to the body and one poised forwards with half-bent elbow, conveyed a haunting suggestion of some hawk-faced god of Babylon.

A cold sweat came over Mr. Dryden's brow as his nervous fingers stretched over the chessmen, for he was to make the first move. The full disaster of his affairs was unpleasantly real in his mind, and something burning seemed to press on the back of his eyes. Then the scene on the

picture-sheet of his brain shifted to the ferryside, and as he saw again the tide catch the body of Mr. Murray and whirl it out to sea, self-recovery came to him at once. He straightened his arm and advanced a pawn upon the board. As he did so the familiar click of the released mechanism of the stop-watch, brought an aspect of custom, and he sat back in his chair in the tranquil knowledge that the end of the time-limit would find the Automaton still motionless, and the wager his. Behind it, at a little distance, sat Greet, in a like comfortable confidence, while the two pressmen, their bodies bent forward, their hands clasped between their knees, brought near to Mr. Dryden the air of intense excitement that hushed the silent hundreds at his side. The stop-watch had marked four minutes when there was a creaking noise in the Automaton. First the shoulder and then the elbow began to move, and to Mr. Dryden's unspeakable horror the pincers of the hand unclasped, and, poising for a moment, clipped the Queen's Pawn and rapidly moved it forwards. The murderer's face grew ashen grey with fear, his eyes blinked rapidly and his heart stood still.

His first thought was that Murray was not, after all, the guiding spirit of the Automaton, that he had killed an inoffensive man for no reason. He heard again the dull sound of breaking bone, and the sucking noise of the rolling body on the mud. He could think of nothing else, till the far-away voice of the umpire, announcing that four minutes had gone, pricked his brain into a little consciousness. He hastily stretched out his hand and made a rapid, unconsidered move. As he did so his fingers came for a brief moment in contact with the iron paw of the Automaton, and at the moment of touching he knew who his adversary

was. He felt so strange and terrible a message flash to his brain that his whole body became cold and rigid in a moment.

He could not keep his eyes from the lens-like eyes of his adversary, and he felt rather than saw the intelligence that looked out at him, for he knew he was playing with no earthly opponent.

He made another disastrous and hurried move. Then the head of the Automaton trembled, the lips parted, and it said "Check" loudly and distinctly. The voice was Mr. Murray's voice.

At the end of the five minutes Mr. Greet noticed something strange in Mr. Dryden's attitude. Going hastily up to him, he saw his eyes were wide open but without sight, and when he touched his hand it was cold and still.

Mr. Greet noticed something strange in Mr. Dryden's attitude.

Mr. Dryden was quite dead. The curtain fell, and they carried the body to the Green Room, while in a terror-stricken silence the vast crowd left the theatre. Their last footsteps were still echoing on the other side of the curtain when Greet and Roulain came back to the stage. The doctors and attendants were trying to restore the body of Mr. Dryden in the little room at the back. Greet opened the panel of the figure and called in hoarse, agitated tones to Mr. Murray to come out. There was no answer, and Roulain fetched a candle and they looked into the hollow in surprise. There was no one there!