

The Notting Hill Mystery by Charles Felix

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"In laying before you the extraordinary revelations arising from my examination into the case of the late Madame R**, I have to apologise for the delay in carrying out your instructions of November last. It has been occasioned, not by any neglect on my part, but by the unexpected extent and intricacy of the enquiry into which I have been led. I confess that after this minute and laborious investigation I could still have wished a more satisfactory result, but a perusal of the accompanying documents, on the accuracy and completeness of which you may fully rely, will I doubt not satisfy you of the unusual difficulty of the case. "My enquiries have had reference to a policy of assurance for 5000l., the maximum amount permitted by your rules, on the life of the late Madame R**, effected in your office by her husband, the Baron R**, and bearing date 1st November, 1855. Similar policies were held in the —— of Manchester, the —— of Liverpool, the —— of Edinburgh, and the —— of Dublin, the whole amounting to 25,000l.; the dates, 23rd December, 1855, 10th January, 25th January, and 15th February, 1856, respectively, being in effect almost identical. These companies joined in the instructions under which I have been acting; and, from the voluminous nature of this letter and its enclosures, I shall be obliged by your considering my present reply as addressed to them conjointly with yourselves.

"Before entering upon the subject of my investigations, it may be as well to recapitulate the circumstances under which they were originated. Of these the first was the coincidence of dates, above noticed; and an apparent desire on the part of the assurer to conceal from each of the various offices the fact of similar policies having been elsewhere simultaneously effected. On examining further into the matter your Board was also struck with the peculiar conditions under which the marriage appeared to have taken place, and the relation in which Madame R** had formerly stood to the Baron. To these points, therefore, my attention was especially directed, and the facts thus elicited form a very important link in the singular chain of evidence I have been enabled to put together.

"The chief element of suspicion, however, was to be found in the very unusual circumstances attendant on the death of Madame R**, especially following so speedily as it did on the assurance for so large an aggregate amount. This lady died suddenly on the 15th March, 1857, from the effects of a powerful acid taken, it is supposed, in her sleep, from her husband's laboratory. In the Baron's answers to the usual preliminary enquiries, forwarded for my assistance, and herewith returned, there is no admission of any propensity to somnambulism. Shortly, however, after the occurrence had been noticed in the public prints, a letter to the Secretary of the Association from a gentleman recently lodging in the same house with Baron R**, gave reason to suspect that in this respect, at least, some concealment had been practised, and the matter was then placed in my hands.

"On receipt of your instructions, I at once put myself in communication with Mr. Aldridge, the writer of the letter in question. That gentleman's evidence certainly goes to show that, within at least a very few months after the date of the latest policy, Baron R** was not only himself aware of such a propensity in his wife, but desirous of concealing it from others. Mr. Aldridge's statements are also to a certain extent supported by those of two other witnesses; but, unfortunately, there are, as will be seen, circumstances calculated to throw considerable doubt upon the whole of this evidence, and especially on that of Mr. Aldridge, from which alone the more important part of the inference is drawn. The same must, unfortunately, be said with regard to some other parts of the evidence, as will be more clearly seen when the case itself is before you.



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Brent Campbell:

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