

JACK L'EVENTREUR

Scenes from Life

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English Translation

MOLLY
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Introduction

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Jack the Ripper

Jack the Ripper . . . Of all the murderers in the world, he is the most frightening, like a kind of horrible hallucination. He stamped every one of his crimes with his bloody hall-mark, but hid his own identity so well that today, after more than forty years, he is just as mysterious as he was in the beginning.

The mere syllables of his name evoke the special atmosphere of sordid alleyways teeming with people, foggy evenings, and a phantom being that looms up from nowhere in those evil slums and slaughters the Ladies of the Night with the greatest of ease.

Blood, filth and fog - those are the three essential elements of Jack the Ripper's world. For nearly the entire year of 1888, he terrorized London, especially the Whitechapel district, and his memory has never died. Everyone knows his terrible name but few are familiar with his actual crimes. Although the murders do have a certain fascination in themselves, the reason why they are worth examining in detail is that they remain unsolved, if not unsolvable, to this very day. The series of strange crimes stopped suddenly, and people thought that Jack was dead. Various theories were put forward. Certain individuals, psychotics, of a type well known to alienists, actually confessed to being that most sought-after criminal, risking their necks in the process. He began to put in an appearance in novels and plays, and fantasy fed on legend.

Recently, a new piece of information came out like a bombshell. It appeared that a clairvoyant who had just died in England had made some sensational revelations about the identity of Jack the Ripper: he was none other than a famous London doctor who had been put away in an asylum in Islington. Even the number of his cell was known.

At last, the puzzle seemed to be solved. However, when I had read about the 'revelations' carefully, I was assailed by doubts. Were they

accurate? Had the veil been lifted? Who was this Jack, the author of so many revolting crimes? I became intrigued and began to study the affair closely. It was not at all easy. Proper documentation was lacking. The popular newspapers invented material. There was no truth in what they said.

The murders had been committed in 1888 and there was still a chance that I could find some police-officers who had been involved in the investigation. They would be the ones to give me accurate information, devoid of fantasy. I began my campaign against the hero of Whitechapel, the elusive assassin, and discovered that there was only one survivor of the brilliant Scotland Yard team that had been sent after Jack the Ripper. This was G.W.H., chief constable at the time, now living in a small Yorkshire village. Here, in a cottage embowered in roses, set in the midst of woods and green fields, he had chosen to retire. As soon as I knew of his existence, I was impatient to meet him, although I was worried that he would not be willing to rake over the ashes of the past just for me.

I must say, however, that it was like a miracle - he was very happy to cooperate with me and he had a collection of contemporaneous notes relating to the Whitechapel enquiry. G.W.H. was diminutive, with snow-white hair and cheeks as red as rare roast beef. He was nothing like the classic detective in the novels following Sherlock Holmes, being neither gaunt, dry, taciturn, nor neurotic.

I put up at the village inn and went over to talk to this splendid little man every day. He told me all he knew, in detail, and showed me the documents in his possession. Afterwards, I went over G.W.H.'s information with a fine tooth-comb, and carefully examined the five suspects against whom a strong case could be made out.
