

# THE BISHOP MURDER CASE

A PHILO VANCE STORY

By

S. S. VAN DINE

The Earth is a Temple where there is  
going on a Mystery Play, childish and  
poignant, ridiculous and awful enough  
in all conscience.—*Conrad.*

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
MCMXXIX

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## CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

**PHILO VANCE**

**JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM**

District Attorney of New York County.

**ERNEST HEATH**

Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.

**PROFESSOR BERTRAND DILLARD**

A famous physicist.

**BELLE DILLARD**

His niece.

**SIGURD ARNESSON**

His adopted son: an associate professor of mathematics.

**PYNE**

The Dillard butler.

**BEEDLE**

The Dillard cook.

**ADOLPH DRUKKER**

Scientist and author.

**MRS. OTTO DRUKKER**

His mother.

**GRETE MENZEL**

The Drukker cook.

**JOHN PARDEE**

Mathematician and chess expert: inventor of the Pardee gambit.

**J. C. ROBIN**

Sportsman and champion archer.

**RAYMOND SPERLING**

Civil Engineer.

JOHN E. SPRIGG

Senior at Columbia University.

DR. WHITNEY BARSTEAD

An eminent neurologist.

QUINAN

Police Reporter of the *World*.

MADELEINE MOFFAT

CHIEF INSPECTOR O'BRIEN

Of the Police Department of New York City.

WILLIAM M. MORAN

Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.

CAPTAIN PITTS

Of the Homicide Bureau.

GUILFOYLE

Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

SNITKIN

Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

HENNESSEY

Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

EMERY

Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

BURKE

Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

CAPTAIN DUBOIS

Finger-print expert.

DR. EMANUEL DOREMUS

Medical Examiner.

SWACKER

Secretary to the District Attorney.

CURRIE

Vance's valet.

**THE BISHOP  
MURDER CASE**

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## *Another Philo Vance Story*

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## By S. S. VAN DINE

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"Mr. S. S. Van Dine is one of the most ingenious of detective-story writers . . . a master at the game."—*Liverpool* (England) *Post and Mercury*.

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## *Another Philo Vance Story*

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"Seldom has one been so captivated by a murder case which really does thrill."—*The Sussex* (England) *Daily News*.

"Among the best of its kind. The reader will be thrillingly interested in all the details."—*Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis).

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—*Republican* (Springfield).

"Will put Vance high in the respect, if not the affection, of connoisseurs."

—*The Outlook* (London).

\* "An engrossing mystery tale."—*The Outlook* (New York).

"A book which is a pleasure to read from a literary point of view as well as for its story."—*The Birmingham* (England) *Mail*.

"A detective story that is really different. Not only a detective story, but literature, also."—*News* (Detroit).

"One of the best detective stories I have ever read."

—WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.

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## CHAPTER I

“WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?”

*(Saturday, April 2; noon)*

Of all the criminal oases in which Philo Vance participated as an unofficial investigator, the most sinister, the most bizarre, the seemingly most incomprehensible, and certainly the most terrifying, was the one that followed the famous Greene murders.\* The orgy of horror at the old Greene mansion had been brought to its astounding close in December; and after the Christmas holidays Vance had gone to Switzerland for the winter sports. Returning to New York at the end of February he had thrown himself into some literary work he had long had in mind—the uniform translation of the principal fragments of Menander found in the Egyptian papyri during the early years of the present century; and for over a month he had devoted himself sedulously to this thankless task.

Whether or not he would have completed the translations, even had his labors not been interrupted, I do not know; for Vance was a man of cultural ardencies, in whom the spirit of research and intellectual adventure was constantly at odds with the drudgery necessary to scholastic creation. I remember that only the preceding year he had begun writing a life

\* “The Greene Murder Case” (Scribners, 1928).

of Xenophon—the result of an enthusiasm inherited from his university days when he had first read the *Anabasis* and the *Memorabilia*—and had lost interest in it at the point where Xenophon's historic march led the Ten Thousand back to the sea. However, the fact remains that Vance's translation of Menander was rudely interrupted in early April; and for weeks he became absorbed in a criminal mystery which threw the entire country into a state of gruesome excitement.

This new criminal investigation, in which he acted as a kind of *amicus curiæ* for John F.-X. Markham, the District Attorney of New York, at once became known as the Bishop murder case. The designation—the result of our journalistic instinct to attach labels to every *cause célèbre*—was, in a sense, a misnomer. There was nothing ecclesiastical about that ghoulish saturnalia of crime which set an entire community to reading the "Mother Goose Melodies" with fearful apprehension;\* and no one of the name of Bishop was, as far as I know, even remotely connected with the monstrous events which bore that appellation. But, withal, the word "Bishop" was appropriate, for it was an *alias* used by the murderer for the grimmest of purposes. Incidentally it was this name that eventually led Vance to the almost incredible truth, and ended one of the most ghastly multiple crimes in police history.

The series of uncanny and apparently unrelated

\* Mr. Joseph A. Margolies of Brentano's told me that for a period of several weeks during the Bishop murder case more copies of "Mother Goose Melodies" were sold than of any current novel. And one of the smaller publishing houses reprinted and completely sold out an entire edition of those famous old nursery rhymes.

vents which constituted the Bishop murder case and drove all thought of Menander and Greek monstichs from Vance's mind, began on the morning of April 2, less than five months after the double shooting of Julia and Ada Greene. It was one of those warm luxurious spring days which sometimes bless New York in early April; and Vance was breakfasting in his little roof garden atop his apartment in East 38th Street. It was nearly noon—for Vance worked or read until all hours, and was a late riser—and the sun, beating down from a clear blue sky, cast a mantle of introspective lethargy over the city. Vance sprawled in an easy chair, his breakfast on a low table beside him, gazing with cynical, regretful eyes down at the treetops in the rear yard.

I knew what was in his mind. It was his custom each spring to go to France; and it had long since come to him to think, as it came to George Moore, that Paris and May were one. But the great trek of the post-war American *nouveaux riches* to Paris had spoiled his pleasure in this annual pilgrimage; and, only the day before, he had informed me that we were to remain in New York for the summer.

For years I had been Vance's friend and legal adviser—a kind of monetary steward and agent-companion. I had quitted my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine to devote myself wholly to his interests—a post I found far more congenial than that of general attorney in a stuffy office—and though my own bachelor quarters were in a hotel on the West Side, I spent most of my time at Vance's apartment.

I had arrived early that morning, long before

Vance was up, and, having gone over the first-of-the-month accounts, now sat smoking my pipe idly as he breakfasted.

"Y' know, Van," he said to me, in his emotionless drawl; "the prospect of spring and summer in New York is neither excitin' nor romantic. It's going to be a beastly bore. But it'll be less annoyin' than travelin' in Europe with the vulgar hordes of tourists jostlin' one at every turn. . . . It's very distressin'."

Little did he suspect what the next few weeks held in store for him. Had he known I doubt if even the prospect of an old pre-war spring in Paris would have taken him away; for his insatiable mind liked nothing better than a complicated problem; and even as he spoke to me that morning the gods that presided over his destiny were preparing for him a strange and fascinating enigma—one which was to stir the nation deeply and add a new and terrible chapter to the annals of crime.

Vance had scarcely poured his second cup of coffee when Currie, his old English butler and general factotum, appeared at the French doors bearing a portable telephone.

"It's Mr. Markham, sir," the old man said apologetically. "As he seemed rather urgent, I took the liberty of informing him you were in." He plugged the telephone into a baseboard switch, and set the instrument on the breakfast table.

"Quite right, Currie," Vance murmured, taking off the receiver. "Anything to break this deuced monotony." Then he spoke to Markham. "I say, old man, don't you ever sleep? I'm in the midst of

an *omelette aux fines herbes*. Will you join me? Or do you merely crave the music of my voice——?"

He broke off abruptly, and the bantering look on his lean features disappeared. Vance was a marked Nordic type, with a long, sharply chiselled face; gray, wide-set eyes; a narrow aquiline nose; and a straight oval chin. His mouth, too, was firm and clean-cut, but it held a look of cynical cruelty which was more Mediterranean than Nordic. His face was strong and attractive, though not exactly handsome. It was the face of a thinker and recluse; and its very severity—at once studious and introspective—acted as a barrier between him and his fellows.

Though he was immobile by nature and sedulously schooled in the repression of his emotions, I noticed that, as he listened to Markham on the phone that morning, he could not entirely disguise his eager interest in what was being told him. A slight frown ruffled his brow; and his eyes reflected his inner amazement. From time to time he gave vent to a murmured "Amazin'!" or "My word!" or "Most extr'ordin'ry!"—his favorite expletives—and when at the end of several minutes he spoke to Markham, a curious excitement marked his manner.

"Oh, by all means!" he said. "I shouldn't miss it for all the lost comedies of Menander. . . . It sounds mad. . . . I'll don fitting raiment immediately. . . . *Au revoir*."

Replacing the receiver, he rang for Currie.

"My gray tweeds," he ordered. "A sombre tie, and my black Homburg hat." Then he returned to his omelet with a preoccupied air.

After a few moments he looked at me quizzically.

"What might you know of archery, Van?" he asked.

I knew nothing of archery, save that it consisted of shooting arrows at targets, and I confessed as much.

"You're not exactly revealin', don't y' know." He lighted one of his *Régie* cigarettes indolently. "However, we're in for a little flutter of toxophily, it seems. I'm no leading authority on the subject myself, but I did a bit of potting with the bow at Oxford. It's not a passionately excitin' pastime—much duller than golf and fully as complicated." He smoked a while dreamily. "I say, Van; fetch me Doctor Elmer's tome on archery from the library—there's a good chap."\*

I brought the book, and for nearly half an hour he dipped into it, tarrying over the chapters on archery associations, tournaments and matches, and scanning the long tabulation of the best American scores. At length he settled back in his chair. It was obvious he had found something that caused him troubled concern and set his sensitive mind to work.

"It's quite mad, Van," he remarked, his eyes in space. "A mediæval tragedy in modern New York! We don't wear buskins and leathern doublets, and yet—*By Jove!*" He suddenly sat upright. "No—no! It's absurd. I'm letting the insanity of Markham's news affect me. . . ." He drank some more coffee, but his expression told me that he could not rid himself of the idea that had taken possession of him.

\* The book Vance referred to was that excellent and comprehensive treatise, "Archery," by Robert P. Elmer, M.D.



“One more favor, Van,” he said at length. “Fetch me my German diction’ry and Burton E. Stevenson’s ‘Home Book of Verse.’ ”

When I had brought the volumes, he glanced at one word in the dictionary, and pushed the book from him.

“That’s that, unfortunately—though I knew it all the time.”

Then he turned to the section in Stevenson’s gigantic anthology which included the rhymes of the nursery and of childhood. After several minutes he closed that book, too, and, stretching himself out in his chair, blew a long ribbon of smoke toward the awning overhead.

“It can’t be true,” he protested, as if to himself. “It’s too fantastic, too fiendish, too utterly distorted. A fairy tale in terms of blood—a world in anamorphosis—a perversion of all rationality. . . . It’s unthinkable, senseless, like black magic and sorcery and thaumaturgy. It’s downright demented.”

He glanced at his watch and, rising, went indoors, leaving me to speculate vaguely on the cause of his unwonted perturbation. A treatise on archery, a German dictionary, a collection of children’s verses, and Vance’s incomprehensible utterances regarding insanity and fantasy—what possible connection could these things have? I attempted to find a least common denominator, but without the slightest success. And it was no wonder I failed. Even the truth, when it came out weeks later bolstered up by an array of incontestable evidence, seemed too incredible and too wicked for acceptance by the normal mind of man.

Vance shortly broke in on my futile speculations.