

THE ADVENTURE OF THE LATE MR. FAVERSHAM A Solar Pons story By August Derleth (From Regarding Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of Solar Pons, Copyright 1945 by August Derleth) Version 1.0

WHEN I LOOK over my notes on the cases that engaged Solar Pons' attention during the decade begun in 1919, I find many amazing adventures whose details ought to be placed before the public. There were in that time, for instance, the perplexing affair of the Mumbles, known to the public for many months as the Swansea Mystery; the curious interlude of the Sotheby Salesman, who was found dead in an empty house; the adventure of the Black Cardinal, that unbelievable conspiracy which threatened to undermine the Papacy and overthrow half the governments of Europe. But few of the problems of that decade so fascinated me as the affair of the late Mr. Faversham. The facts of the case were utterly baffling when Pons first read of it in the News of the World, where it appeared under the head: "Amazing Mystery in Strand." I saw his eyes gleam, and I observed that he read the account twice before he turned to me. "Now here's a pretty mystery, Parker," he chuckled. "Professor F.V. Faversham of Merk College, has walked into his house and disappeared." "Of course there's some mistake in the report." Pons shook his head thoughtfully. "That seems hardly likely at first glance. The word into is especially black-faced, and while the matter is treated rather lightly, the fact remains that Faversham's disappearance into his house is unmistakably emphasized." "No doubt there are any number of ways he might have got out." "It does not seem so. Observe: the house was boarded during the extent of the professor's six months' leave; his front door, the only entrance not so treated, was under observation. Faversham had returned to London from Scotland and was to spend a five-day interval in London before completing his vacation in Germany." "Aha!" I laughed. "Secret passages!" Pons smiled. "Perhaps we shall walk over in that direction this evening." "It will certainly do no harm. But I daresay the matter is much more simple than the papers would have it." "That is quite possible, Parker," returned Pons. "But at least this gentleman, Mr. Faversham, has done us a favor in so radically departing from precedent as to walk into his house and vanish. So many persons walk out of their houses and are never seen again; the occurrence is so common that it seldom attracts my attention, unless of course, its salient features are so strange that I cannot help feeling drawn toward the matter." "His name is familiar to me," I said presently. "It occurs to me that I have seen it in connection with Lincoln's Inn Fields--a barrister, I believe." "So? Then doubtless he holds classes in law at Merk College." He said nothing more, and apparently the matter of the lost Mr. Faversham was relegated to the past, for Pons did not touch upon his suggestion of walking to the house on Slade Street that evening. But our attention was shortly recalled to the case of Mr. Faversham, for an hour afterward, there was a sharp ring at the bell, and in a few moments Mrs. Johnson ushered two elderly gentlemen into the room. I recognized one of them immediately as Dr. Joseph Dannel, President of Merk College. He took precedence over his companion and bowed to Pons, introducing himself, and then his companion, Dr. Hanley Fessenden, likewise of Merk College. "Be seated, Gentlemen," said Pons. "Thank you," replied Dr. Dannel gravely, nervously fingering his sideburns. "We've come to consult you professionally about a matter deeply concerning our college--a very delicate matter, Mr. Pons." "Indeed?" Correctly interpreting their glance in my direction, he introduced me, and almost instantly diverted their attention from me by observing that if they insisted upon walking, they might better have come up Southampton Road and crossed to our lodgings on Praed Street than to have come up Kingsway and along Oxford Street and Edgware Road, which were considerably more dusty than the more direct route. The dust on their trousers clearly indicated the basis for Pons' deduction, which served his purpose in bringing their attention back to him. Pons leaned back, bringing his fingertips together, and waited, suggestively. Dr. Dannel coughed. "You may have seen the account of the disappearance of Professor Faversham, of our

faculty?" "Walked into his house and vanished," said Pons, reaching again for the paper he had only a little while before put to one side. Dr. Dannel nodded. "Then you know the primary facts of the matter. Professor Faversham has always been a man of the most upright character, Mr. Pons; he is highly respected at the college, with a reputation for extraordinary wit and a very pleasant personality. His life has always been very regular, and therefore his strange disappearance is all the more amazing. We cannot help but suspect foul play." "You have someone in mind, perhaps, Gentlemen?" "No one," answered Dannel. "Then obviously you have specific reason for believing that some one has made away with Professor Faversham. May I know it?" "Certainly, Mr. Pons. It is this. Professor Faversham is our treasurer; for the last year he has had complete charge of ten thousand pounds of our money. Five days ago Professor Faversham returned to London from a three months' vacation in Scotland; he is on a six months' leave at present. On his return, he saw fit to draw our money from the bank. We did not question his motive, confident that his action would be to our ultimate benefit." "When was the money drawn out?" "Yesterday morning, Mr. Pons. It was to have been returned today, for Professor Faversham was to leave for Berlin tomorrow morning to complete his leave of absence." "He notified you that he was drawing out the money?" "Certainly. Everything was done in the proper order." "How many people knew of the transaction?" asked Pons after a momentary hesitation. "I fear you will gain nothing in that direction, Mr. Pons. I admit that we were rather indiscreet about the matter, and it came out; virtually all the tutors and lecturers in the college knew of it. And then there are, of course, the bank officials." Pons contemplated his pipe thoughtfully. "You asked no questions of Professor Faversham?" "None. We suggested as a matter of course that he give us some clue to his intention, but he did not do so." "Surely that is an unusual, not to say irregular, procedure?" "Oh, most irregular, Mr. Pons, admittedly. But we have done it before, and we have never lost anything through any of Professor Faversham's transactions. He has a good eye for investments, and in every case previous to this time, his investment has proved a very good thing." "As a barrister, Mr. Faversham may have known prominent people in other fields--brokers, perhaps. Is there any possibility that he might have invested your money in stocks?" Dr. Dannel looked uneasy, his austere features colored a little. He glanced at his companion before he admitted at last that it had been suggested that Professor Faversham might have dabbled in the market. His statement was reserved almost to coolness. Pons said nothing for a moment, but a keen look came into his eyes. "Did Professor Faversham spend his London interlude at his home on Slade Street, or at an hotel?" "That we cannot say. He spent a part of each day at his home; but it is equally certain that he did not spend his nights there." "Do you know whether he at any time entertained visitors at his home?" "We know of one man, Mr. Pons, of whom he spoke to us. Dr. Hans von Ruda, a professor retired from the University of Bonn." "You saw them together?" "We saw von Ruda enter Faversham's home. My own home is just across the street from number 27." Pons sat for a few moments, his eyes contemplative. "I take it you want me to find Professor Faversham and the ten thousand pounds," he said presently. "Quite so, Mr. Pons. We would not like the members of the college board to know that we had been in the practice of following so irregular procedure in regard to our funds. Dr. Fessenden and I are making this our personal concern, and you will have carte blanche--we will cover all your expenses in addition to your fee." "Very well, Gentlemen, I will take the matter up." Pons had hardly bowed the two professors from our lodgings before we were on the street ourselves. He hailed a cab at once, and in a few moments we passed our recent visitors walking slowly in the direction of the college. We drove rapidly along Edgware Road, but were halted for a short time at the Marble Arch by the increasing traffic along Bayswater Road and Oxford Street. In considerably less than half an hour, however, we drew up before number 27 Slade Street, from the steps of which came a young constable whom I recognized as Mecker, with whom Pons had previously worked. He came down the path to meet

us as we crossed from the curb. "Common sort of house, isn't it, Meeker?" observed Pons in greeting, looking at the ordinary, one-storey stuccoed house that faced us. "Like most of the others on this street, Mr. Pons. This one was built by Faversham about three years ago." "All boarded up, just as the papers had it." "Yes, for the length of Faversham's leave. A good job, too. He couldn't possibly have got out by any passage but this front door." His intelligent young face clouded in perplexity. "And he's not in the house?" "Certainly not, Mr. Pons. We searched it from top to bottom. No tunnels, no secret passages, nothing. We did look, on the theory that we can't afford to neglect any openings, no matter how improbable." "Dear me!" said Pons with a thin smile. "If Faversham isn't in the house, and couldn't have got out any other way than this front door--then he must have come out the front." "And that's just what he did not do." "No?" "No! Professor von Ruda swears that the door was not lost to his sight for a moment. Not only that, but from the time he gave up Faversham as lost, I was here at the door." "That is most singular. How did it come about?" "Von Ruda had been visiting Faversham. When he got ready to leave, Faversham kindly offered to walk to the Strand with him, and to wait there with him until an omnibus came. The two men came out on the stoop. It was a frightfully foggy and wet night, and Faversham went back into the house to get his waterproof. Von Ruda remained standing on the stoop, waiting for Faversham to return. When he tired at last, he went into the house and directly down the short hall to the alcove where he knew Faversham kept his waterproof. "The coat was there, but the professor was not. All this time he had the front door in sight. When von Ruda could not find the professor, he called him and finally came back to the stoop. I was passing, and hearing his calls, I came up the walk where von Ruda discovered me and related the incident. I instructed him to wait, which he did, and called Inspector Jamison. The door was therefore not out of our sight for so much as a moment." Pons gazed reflectively at Mecker, taking out his pipe now and filling it. "You admit that the fellow simply couldn't have vanished into air?" "Certainly, Mr. Pons. But where did he go? We've ransacked the house even to the extent of digging up the basement floor." "Well, one of two solutions presents itself. Faversham either went out this door, or he did not." "I give you my word that he did not go out of it," said Mecker. Mecker looked sharply at Pons. "But von Ruda insists that he did. He saw him." "Then you may take my word that he never went in." "What about von Ruda?" "Retired from Bonn in 1921. As far as we know, he has a perfect record. He lectured in philosophy, with part time in law and logic; he has a string of degrees that would put the alphabet to shame. We wired the university immediately." "Von Ruda is being held, I take it?" "Jamison insisted on it. He's in a temper by this time, to my way of thinking. He's booked to sail tomorrow, and as it looks now, he won't get away until we find some clue to Faversham's disappearance." Pons chuckled. "Count one for Jamison; he has had the good sense to see that there is a serious flaw somewhere in this fabrication, and he's taking no chance of allowing his star witness to escape!" Mecker threw open the front door, and we found ourselves gazing down a short hall, at the far end of which was the alcove where a waterproof coat hung in plain sight. Pons stood briefly on the threshold; then he strode rapidly down to the alcove, where he turned and looked speculatively at us. "He certainly could not miss seeing the door, could he?" he remarked drily. "Did von Ruda explain why he didn't go through the house?" "Faversham was using only his library, where he had put up a cot for the nights he meant to be in London, since he didn't want to open a bedroom. The door immediately to the right of this front entrance leads directly into his library, and Faversham was not there when von Ruda looked into it as he came back to the stoop." "And the other doors? What about them?" "All locked, Mr. Pons. I tried them at once before I called Jamison." Pons nodded and came briskly toward the library door. "Well, then, let us just have a look at the library." The library was a low, dimly-lit room. Mecker turned up the lights as we entered, and revealed that every wall, to the jambs of the doors and the

one window, was lined with high shelves, and every shelf filled with books. In the center of the room stood an old-fashioned desk-table. On it were a few scattered papers and two books--one closed, with a projecting slip of paper to mark a place, the other turned face down at a point to which Faversham must have got when von Ruda came to visit him. Against the shelves to the left of the table was a cot, which gave evidence of having recently been slept in, for the sheets were partly thrown back and rumpled. Pons went directly to the bed and came to his knees the better to examine it. He pulled back the sheets gingerly, and spent some moments scrutinizing the impression in the bed. That he had discovered something when he rose, I saw at a glance, but I forebore to question him, knowing that if his discovery should ultimately fit into the pattern of his solution, he would reveal it in good time. Then he went to the library table and proceeded to examine the books and papers on it. One paper he passed over to Mecker; it was Professor Faversham's passport, dated for the following day. Pons next gave his attention to the books on the shelves, passing from one shelf to another and drawing books from their places to leaf through them. He crossed and recrossed the room, finally returned to his starting point. Contrary to our expectations, he did not stop his examination of the books, but started all over, taking each book as he came to it, skipping only those he remembered having looked into before. "You might take Parker over the house, Mecker," he said, turning to the constable. "It will take some time to finish here." Mecker agreed reluctantly. When we returned to the library, we found Pons engrossed in a volume of German prose written, as the printing on its cover gave evidence, by Dr. Hans von Ruda. He looked up at our entrance. "Will you want to look over the rest of the house, Mr. Pons?" asked Mecker. "I think not. My little examination has been most valuable, and I doubt whether anything found in the other rooms could contribute much more. I'm taking this book with me, by the way. It's a text on philosophy by Dr. von Ruda, a presentation copy from the author to Faversham--a gift, I take it, since the inscription is Christmas, 1921." "Was it on the shelves?" "No--in one of the drawers of the desk." We left the house, Mecker walking down the path with us. At the walk, Mecker asked, "Have you any suggestion that might help us, Mr. Pons?" "I might suggest only that you examine the books in the library. It may lead you to something. Then, you might look into the drawers, if you have not already done so. By the way, you've looked up the hotel at which Dr. von Ruda stayed?" "Of course. It is the Adelphi." "Indeed! Well, I may call them." Pons half turned, then hesitated. "And Mecker, you might give that bed a closer scrutiny. You'll find, I think, that it's been slept in only once; it looks rather as if it had been used with the intention of giving that impression. Faversham, however, has been in London five days. Dr. Dunnell, who lives just across the street in that white, railed-in house, informs me that Faversham did not spend his nights, here." "What do you make of it?" "I think it would be wise to discover where Faversham spent his nights, eh, Mecker?" "Yes, it might be," agreed Mecker, now deeply puzzled. "When are you relieved here?" "At seven-thirty this evening. Then I report to the Yard before being released for the night." "Well, if it is not too inconvenient, try to get over to 7 Praed Street before midnight. I may have something for you." It was already dark when we ascended to our lodgings in Praed Street. Under the green-shaded table lamp in our study, Pons took the German book from his pocket and handed it to me. "Take a look at it, Parker. It's rather interesting." I took the book and began to examine it, while he occupied himself on the telephone. The book was bound in black cloth, and the printing on its cover was large. The gold-leaf lettering of the title read, Die Philosophie. It was a ponderous volume of some nine hundred pages. The title page was inscribed: Mit Freundlichen Gruss, Hans von Ruda--Weinachten, 1921. The text was printed in large type and easy to read, though the pages were uncommonly thin. I turned the book over and over in my hands, and leafed through it in the hope of discovering what Pons seemed to have found. But when he turned from the telephone at last I knew no more than when he had handed me the book. "Well,

what do you make of it?" asked Pons. "At first glance I'd say the book was little used," I ventured. "Elementary--but still of some significance in view of the fact that von Ruda and Faversham are warm friends, and since Faversham has had the book since 1921, with ample time to go through it. Yet several pages are still uncut. You noticed nothing else?" "Nothing. Why?" "No matter. I'll come back to the book later." He put the book away. "You went through the house, Parker. What did you see?" "Enough to assure me that Faversham couldn't have gotten out of any window or either back or side door; everything is securely boarded up, and no one could go through without leaving telltale marks. There are none. Moreover Mecker systematically tapped the walls. There just isn't room in the small proportions of the building for anything in the nature of a secret passage--but that would impute a criminal motive to Faversham himself, rather than to some outsider." Pons shrugged. "Not necessarily. But I hardly expect to discover any secret passages." "Well, there's certainly a flaw somewhere--the professor simply didn't walk into his house and vanish." "Well, that is the story, Parker," said Pons, chuckling. "But perhaps the flaw is not in the story. We shall see. I have just called the Yard and asked to have Professor von Ruda sent up with Mecker when he comes. Until then, let us forget about the matter." We had not long to wait, for in something like two hours the bell rang. The ringing of the bell was followed by Mecker, who trailed in his wake a shabby, bent old man, who bore all the obvious earmarks of a professor. He was thin, yet his features gave the impression of being wizened and drawn. His eyes were hidden behind old-fashioned green spectacles. On his scant hair he wore an equally old-fashioned beaver hat, and a long black capecoat reached below his knees. To cap this almost ridiculous outfit, the German professor carried firmly in one hand a bulging umbrella of indeterminate age. "Well, sir," he addressed Pons in a high, shrill voice, "I hope you have found what has become of my esteemed colleague; it is certainly not to my liking to be detained much longer." "Especially since your boat leaves tomorrow, eh, Doctor?" asked Pons quietly. "Exactly. I don't want to miss it. But come, sir, tell us--you've discovered something?" "Yes, I may say I have," replied Pons in that unfailingly calm manner in which he was accustomed to make the most important announcements. "I look forward to producing the lost Mr. Faversham before the night is over." Surprise stilled the room, following Pons' statement. Mecker flashed a glance of perplexity at me; I returned it. Only von Ruda remained unmoved; he did not ask, as I expected him to, whether Faversham would be found alive or dead, but only said that he hoped Pons was right, and that he would then be able to sail after all. "To begin with," said Pons, "I should like to hear your story, Doctor." "Again?" snapped the professor curtly. He shrugged. "I suppose I must go through with it. Must you have all of it?" "All." Von Ruda shrugged his shapeless shoulders again and began. "As you no doubt know, I have been visiting in London; I was in Paris and had arranged to meet my good friend and colleague, Professor Faversham, at his home directly on his return from Scotland. That was five days ago. I came to London, registered at the Adelphi, and that evening went to Faversham's home. He had just got in, and we spent some hours together. It was late when I returned to the hotel, as perhaps the clerks will tell you, if you care to inquire." "Quite so. I have already done so. I am informed also that you left the hotel regularly each day some time before dawn. I take it you spent every day with Professor Faversham?" "Yes. We were working together. That is, up to last night. I spent yesterday with Faversham. When I rose to go close to midnight, he volunteered to walk with me to the thoroughfare--the Strand, I believe it is called--where I could take a conveyance. We came out together to the front stoop. There Faversham left me to get his waterproof coat, which was not far down the hall from the front door. I stood on the stoop to wait for him." "How long did you wait?" "I should say not quite ten minutes. Then I entered the house and looked for him. I had the open front door within sight at all times. He was not in the alcove, his waterproof coat had not been taken from its hook, he was not in the library, and finally, he was not on the stoop

when I returned there. I called him, and my calls attracted the attention of the constable who brought me here tonight. Doubtless you already know his story." "You say you glanced into the library. Could Dr. Faversham have been hiding in that room?" "That is impossible, sir. If you have seen the room you will realize that the walls present even expanses of booklined shelves. The only object at all large enough to conceal someone is the desk, and that is so placed that from the door fully three sides of it are visible." Pons nodded. "There is a door leading from the library into an inner room. Could Professor Faversham have passed through this?" A mirthless smile crossed the German professor's face. "No, no, my dear sir," he replied in an irritated voice. "That door was securely locked. Had you taken the trouble to investigate further, you would have seen that it leads into a narrow closet." Pons paid no attention to von Ruda's caustic reply. "Of course, my dear Doctor, you realize that there is a flaw of some magnitude in the problem as it is being presented to us?" "Indeed, Mr. Pons? Perhaps you would like to suggest that I myself made some magic to bring about my friend's disappearance without trace?" "Nothing so crude, my dear Doctor, nothing so crude," replied Pons, chuckling. "But consider the logic of your statements. You say you had the door in sight every moment; this door is the only available mode of exit from the house. Yet, after having seen Professor Faversham enter the house, and having kept the only usable entrance under observation, you continue to hold that Faversham did not leave this house, in the face of the fact that Faversham is not now in it." "Overlooking your rambling way of putting it, that is what I maintain." "Did you look behind the waterproof?" asked Pons suddenly. "Yes, I did." "Suppose we wish to assume that Faversham had a reason to disappear. Suppose he were hiding behind the door when you walked down to the alcove. If this were true, could he have stepped from the house at the moment when you looked behind the waterproof?" The professor's features underwent an almost ludicrous change. "If--I say, if that were true, yes, he could." "Good. Very good!" exclaimed Pons. "We seem to be getting somewhere." He reached over now and picked up *Die Philosophie*. "Do you recognize this volume, Professor?" "I do. I gave the book to Dr. Faversham as a Christmas gift in 1921." "I gathered as much from the inscription." As he replaced the book, Pons asked, "At about what date did you dispatch the gift to Faversham?" "I think it was sometime in the first week of December, 1921." Nodding, Pons rose from his chair. "I think that is all, Professor von Ruda." "And Professor Faversham?" queried the German in his sharp, shrill voice. "I am ready to produce him," said Pons tranquilly. With these words he leaned forward easily and with one movement snatched the green spectacles from the face of the German scholar at the same time that he brought away most of the skillfully drawn lines on one side of the face. The fellow was up at a bound, and upon Pons, but Mecker collared him from behind. "Professor Faversham--at our service," said Pons. To Mecker he added, "You may arrest him on the charge of attempting the embezzlement of ten thousand pounds of the funds of Merk College." Faversham said nothing, but his eyes were steady in their intentness upon Pons. Pons sat down and drew out his pipe as casually as if he had done nothing unusual. "My good Faversham," said Pons, "your scheme was too perfect. Your mind worked two paces ahead of the plan. You made your first mistake in this book--" he tapped *Die Philosophie*--"when you dated a second edition printed in April, 1922, as of Christmas, 1921. Your second error was in the matter of your books. When a man's library is stripped of all books possessing any intrinsic personal value--gift books, books with other pleasant association such as a professor is in a position to receive--it is a safe guess to assume that all such books have been permanently shipped away. Certainly a professor on his leave would not take them along. Where, then, were they, and why were they gone? "The answer is fairly obvious. You entrenched yourself in the trust of the authorities of the college to such an extent that even now it will be difficult for them to believe in your duplicity. You hoped to vanish completely under suspicion of being the victim of foul play, so that you would not be sought, and then later you could turn

up somewhere on the Continent as a respectable middle-aged man--at that place to which you doubtless shipped your books before you went to Scotland. "On your return then, you registered at the Adelphi as Dr. Hans von Ruda, whom you knew to have been retired from the University of Bonn in 1921, and who would therefore be difficult to locate at short notice. You knew also that inquiry might be made at Bonn, and you were quite safe there. Then, in order to substantiate your friendship, you obtained a copy of von Ruda's book and inadvertently dated the edition five months before it was printed. This you left for us to see--a kind of circumstantial evidence of a friendship which did not exist. "As von Ruda you spent your nights at the Adelphi, but before dawn you left the hotel and spent your days as Professor Faversham, allowing yourself to be seen frequently by Dr. Dunnell, a dependable witness who lived across the street, and who was permitted to see von Ruda also, so that he could testify to von Ruda's presence, if necessary. You even went to the extent of getting two passports, one for yourself and one for von Ruda. Your own you left on your library table to help give the impression of an unpremeditated departure. "You failed to realize that you might be held as a material witness. Up to that point, you were relatively safe. Had you simply decamped with the money, you would have been hounded for the rest of your life; with Faversham given up for dead, you would be free to live your own life. And then when you saw that there were suspicions, you seized upon the first suggestion I made to alter your story--that perhaps Faversham had got out of the door while you were peering about in the alcove: this in the face of your emphatic denial of any such suggestion. "Incidentally, your little maneuver of sleeping once on your cot was rather amusing. There is a great difference between sleeping once and five times in a bed, as the sheets and the impressions will quickly reveal to a careful observer. The single impression is consistently clear, the outlines usually quite plain, the sheets rumpled only in the place where you lie; but a number of impressions will produce a blurred and broadened rumpling and outline." "Is that all?" asked the professor calmly. "I fancy it will be quite enough, Dr. Faversham." "Well, it has been an amusing hour, Mr. Pons," said the professor in a relieved voice. "But I fear we shall have to bid you good night." He left the room, shepherded by Mecker, whose delight shone in his grateful eyes, as if he had not a care in the world. Pons strode to the window to watch them enter a cab. "I fancy," he said over his shoulder, "Faversham might have been a really great criminal. The potentialities were there." His tone was almost regretful.

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