I WAS MORE amused than shocked when I first realized that I was a matchbox and pencil pocketer: it seemed a harmless enough form of absent-mindedness. Why matchbox and pencil pocketers -- the aberrancy is quite a common one -- should not also take cigarette lighters and fountain pens, no psychologist has been able to explain; but in practice they never do. Another odd thing about them is that, however slow and stupid on other occasions, they are quick as lightning and as cunning as weasels when they go into action.

'Sign, please!' the errand boy would call at the door of my flat in Hammersmith Mall, and when I came out, fumbling half-heartedly in my pockets for a pencil, he would offer me his. Then, after scribbling my name on the chit, I would perform some ingenious sleight-of-hand -- but exactly how and what must remain unknown, because I never caught myself at it. All I can say is that he went off whistling, convinced that the pencil was back behind his ear, while I retired indoors with a clear conscience; and that, when I emptied my pockets before going to bed, the nasty chewed stub of indelible was there, large as life, along with other more handsome trophies. As for matches: I would stop a stranger in the street, politely ask for a light, strike a match on the box he offered and, after hypnotizing him (and myself) into the belief that I had returned it, thank him and stroll slowly off. I often wonder what a film-take of the incident would have shown.

Pencils are cheap, matches are cheaper still. My friends remained seemingly unaware of my depredations, or at any rate never accused me of them, until one Easter I went to stay at Kirtlington near Oxford with one F.C.C. Borley, a Wadham don who lectured on moral philosophy and was an expert on French literature and wine.

Borley was youngish, with an unwholesome complexion, lank hair, and so disagreeable a voice and manner that he literally had not a friend in the world -- unless one counted me, and neither of us really liked the other. His fellow-dons couldn't stand him, though he had a well-stored and accurate mind, praiseworthy loyalty to the College, and no obvious vices -- except to dress like a stage-Frenchman and always to be in the right. He gave them the creeps, they said, and agreed that his election had been a major disaster. I had met him by chance on a walking tour in Andalusia, where I nursed him through an illness because nobody else was about; and now I was helping him with the typescript of a book he had written on drinking-clubs at the English Universities. I never pretended to compete with him in vintage scholarship or to share his rhetorical raptures over such and such a glorious port-wine year -- Borley always chose to call it 'port wine' -- or the peculiar and Elysian bouquet of this or that little known Château.

And never let on that, in fact, I considered port primarily an invalid's drink and preferred an honest Spanish red wine or brandy to the most cultivated French. The only subject on which I claimed to be knowledgeable was sherry, a wine singled out for praise in the Fellows' grace at Wadham, and therefore not to be lightly disregarded by Borley, even though it meant nothing to his palate.

He had a Savoyard chef called Plessis whose remarkable ragouts and crêmes and soufflés these elegant wines served well enough to wash down. Out of respect for Plessis I never contradicted Borley or listened with anything but close attention to his endless dissertations on food, wine, the French classics and eighteenth-century drinking habits. In exchange, he accepted my suggested amendments to his book readily enough wherever style, not fact, was in question; but that was because I had left him his affectations and perverse punctuation and everything else that gave the book its unpleasant, personal flavour, and concentrated merely on cutting out irrelevancies and repetitions and taking him up on the finer points of grammar.

Over coffee and brandy one evening, when our work on the book was all but finished, he suddenly unmasked his batteries. 'Fellow-drinker,' he said -- he had a nauseating habit of calling people 'fellow-drinker' at table and 'fellow-gamester' at cards -- 'I have a crow to pluck with you, and what could be a more suitable time than this?'

'Produce your bird,' I answered, and then in a pretty good imitation of Borley himself: 'When we've plucked, singed and gutted it like good scullions, and set aside the tail-feathers for pipe-cleaners, we'll summon Plessis from his cabinet and leave him to the fulfilment of his genius. I have no doubt but he'll stuff the carrion with prunes soaked in rose-water, chopped artichoke hearts, paprika, and grated celeriac -- then stew gently in a swaddling of cabbage-leaves and serve with hot mousseron sauce... What wine shall we say, fellow-drinker? Maître Corbeau, 1921? Or something with even more body?'

But Borley was not to be sidetracked. 'Frankly,' he continued, jutting out his pointed chin with its silly black imperial, 'it goes against my conscience as a host to make the disclosure, but in vino veritas, you know: you're a damned thief!'

I flushed. 'Go and count your German-silver teaspoons, check your forged fore-edge paintings, send Mme Plessis upstairs to go through my linen in search of your absurd Sulka neck-ties. There's not an object in this house that I'd accept as a gift, except some of your sherry -- though not all of that. Your taste in furnishings and objets d'art is almost as bad as your manners, or your English grammar.'

He was prepared for some such come-back and met it calmly. 'Yesterday, friend Reginald Massie,' he said pompously, 'you stole every match I possessed. Today I sent to the grocer for another packet of a dozen boxes. Tonight there's only a single box left, that one on the mantelpiece... Just Heavens, and now that too has disappeared! It

was there two minutes ago, I'd stake my reputation -- and I never saw you leave your chair! However, nobody's come in, so pray hand it over!'

He was trembling with passion. Caught on the wrong foot, I began emptying my trouser-pockets, and out came the matchboxes; but, I was glad to see, no more than seven of them.

'There,' I said, 'count! You lie; I did not take the whole dozen. Where are the other five? I believe you're a match-pocketer yourself.'

'You were courteous enough to change for dinner,' he reminded me. 'The rest of the loot will be found in your tennis trousers. And now for the pencils!'

I felt in my breast-pocket and pulled out eight or nine. 'The perquisite of my profession,' I explained lightly. 'Think of the trouble I've taken in correcting your illiterate English, not to mention your more than sketchy Spanish. I needed a whole fistful of pencils. You'd probably have had them all back before I left.'

'Tell me, how often in your life have you either returned a borrowed pencil or bought a new one?'

'I can't say off-hand. But once, at a Paddington bookstall, I remember...'

'Yes, felonious Massie, I can well picture the scene. Just before the train started you asked the attendant to show you an assortment of propelling-pencils, drew your purse, made a couple of passes and, hey presto, levanted with the whole tray.'

'I have never in my life pocketed a propelling-pencil. That would be theft. You insult me.'

'It's about time someone did, fellow-drinker! What a pettifogging rogue you are, to be sure. Convinced that nobody's going to haul you into Court for the sake of a penny pencil or a ha'penny matchbox, you lose all sense of decency and filch wholesale. Now, if you were to set your covetous eyes on something only a little larger and more valuable, such as, as -- let us say this corkscrew --'

'I wouldn't be found dead with that late-Victorian monstrosity!'

'-- I repeat, with this corkscrew, I'd have a trifle more respect for you. But you stick to your own mean lay. In the criminal world, on dit, William Sikes, the master-burglar, looks down his nose at the ignoble sneak-thief and tuppeny tapper. William's scorn for you, O lower than Autolycus, would be an easterly blast to wither every flower in the summer's garden of your self-esteem.' He leaned back in his ornate chair, placed the tips of his fingers together and eyed me malevolently.

It is a fallacy that good wine makes one less drunk than bad. Borley would never have dared to talk to me like that, if he hadn't had a skinful of his special Pommard; and if I hadn't been matching him glass for glass I should probably have kept my temper. I'd once heard him remark after a post-mortem at a North Oxford bridge-table: '... And if the King of Hearts had worn a brassière and pink bloomers, he'd have been a Queen! So what, fellow-gamesters?' But there was no And if on this occasion.

Frowning, I poured myself another brandy, tossed it over his shirt front, and then tweaked his greasy nose until it bled. I ought to have remembered that he had a weak heart; but then, of course, so ought he.

Borley died, ten days later, after a series of heart-attacks. Nobody knew about the tweaked nose -- it isn't the sort of thing the victim boasts about -- and though I think Plessis and his wife guessed from the brandy on their master's clothes that there had been a brawl, they did not bring the matter up. They benefited unexpectedly from the will: a legacy of a thousand pounds, free of death duties. To me, in spite of my disparagement of his wine, Borley left 'the Worser Part' of his Cellar -- it was another of his affectations to capitalize almost every other word -- while 'the Better' was to go to Wadham Senior Common Room. I had also been appointed his sole executor, which entailed a great deal of tiresome work: it fell to me to organize his funeral and act as chief mourner. The bulk of his estate went to a second cousin, a simple-minded Air Force officer at Banbury, who took one look at the Kirtlington house, pulled a comic face and took the next train back. The will, I should mention, had been a last-minute scrawl, on the flyleaf of a cookery book, which was grudgingly accepted for probate because the nurse and doctor had witnessed it and the intentions were clear enough.

I felt a bit guilty about Borley. Once or twice in the course of the next few weeks I had a novel twinge of conscience when I stowed away my day's catch of pencils and matches in the bottom drawer of my desk. Then one day a letter came from Dick and Alice Semphill reminding me that I was to spend a yachting holiday with them in August, and that Psyche would be found moored in Oulton Broad on the fifteenth, if that suited me. I wrote back that I'd be there without fail, accompanied by a dozen of Borley's burgundies and clarets which, though the Worser Part of his Cellar, were well worth drinking; and a bottle or two of my own Domecq Fundador brandy.

Psyche is a comfortable craft, though rather slow, and the Semphills were glad to see me again. Both of them are mad on sailing. Dick's an architect and Alice and I once nearly got married when we were both under age; we're still a little more than friends. I think that's all I need to say about them here.

The first night in the saloon, just before supper, eight-year-old Bunny Semphill watched me produce a bottle of Beaujolais and offered to uncork it. But he found the job too stiff for him, so I had to finish it.

As I was twisting the cork from the corkscrew, I started as though I had been stung. 'Bunny,' I asked, 'where the deuce did this come from?'

He stared at me. 'I don't know, Mr Massie. I took it from the rack behind you.'

'Dick,' I called, trying not to sound scared, 'where did you get this ivory-handled corkscrew?'

Dick, busy mixing the salad in the galley, called back: 'I didn't know we possessed such a thing. I always use the one on my pocket knife.'

'Well, what's this?' And I showed it to him.

'Never set eyes on it until now.'

Neither, it proved, had Alice Semphill or Captain Murdoch, an Irish Guardsman who was the fifth member of the party.

'You look as though you'd seen a ghost,' said Alice. 'What's so extraordinary about the corkscrew, Reggie? Have you come across it before?'

'Yes: it belonged to the chap who bequeathed me the wine. But the trouble is that it wasn't part of the bequest. I can't make out how it got here.'

'You must have brought it along by mistake. Perhaps it got stuck into one of the bottle-covers.'

'I'd have seen it when I packed them.'

'Not necessarily.'

'Besides, who put it on the rack?'

'Probably yourself. You know, Reggie, you do a lot of pretty absent-minded things. For instance, you pinched all our matches almost as soon as you came aboard. Not that I grudge you them in the least; but I mean...'

'How do you know? Did you see me pick up so much as a single box?'

'No, I can't honestly say I did. But I was wildly looking for a light and saw your raincoat hanging up and tapped the pockets, and they positively rattled...'

'I brought a lot of matches with me. Useful contribution, I thought.'

She let that go with a warning grimace. But the corkscrew mystery remained unsolved. I sincerely hoped that I hadn't suddenly become a major thief, as Borley had wished I would. It might land me in a policecourt -- and eventually in a home for kleptomaniacs. I picked up the corkscrew, which I'd have recognized in a million. It was a stout eighteen-eightyish affair, with an ivory handle and a brush at one end, I suppose for whisking away the cobwebs from the necks of 1847 port bottles.

'Who were the people who chartered Psyche last week?' I asked.

'The Greenyer-Thoms; friends of Dick's brother-in-law George. He's an estate-agent; she paints. They live near Banbury.'

'Aha!' I said, 'that explains it. They must have been at the sale of Borley's effects. The principal legatee is his Air Force cousin, who lives there.'

'Violent T.T. types, the Greenyer-Thoms, both of them,' Alice objected.

'Secret drinkers,' I countered, replacing the corkscrew on the rack. 'That's why they wanted the yacht. It's easy to dispose of the empties; just drop them into the water under cover of night.'

After supper Murdoch asked me jocosely whether he might be allowed to smell the cork of one of my famous brandies. I roused myself from a dark-brown study, fetched a bottle and reached for the corkscrew. It was not on the rack. I glanced sharply from face to face and asked: 'Who's hidden it?'

They all looked up in surprise, but nobody spoke.

'I put it back on the rack and now it's gone. Hand it over, Bunny! You're playing a dangerous game. I'm foolishly sensitive about that corkscrew.'

'I haven't touched it, Mr Massie -- drop dead, I haven't -- I swear!'

'Tap Massie's pockets, Mrs Semphill,' Murdoch invited. 'They're positively wriggling with corkscrews.'

Dick caught a nose-tweaking glint in my eye. 'Gentlemen, gentlemen!' he cried warningly. Then he pulled out his pocket knife.'--This will do, Reggie,' he said.

Dick's a decent fellow.

As I silently uncorked the brandy, Bunny went down on his hands and knees and searched among our feet. Then he rummaged among the cushions behind us.

'Couldn't it be in one of your pockets, Mr Massie?' he asked at last.

'Certainly not!' I snapped. 'And for God's sake don't fidget so, child! Go on deck if you're bored with adult conversation.'

'I was only trying to help.'

'Well, don't try so hard.'

Alice didn't like the way I pitched into the boy and came to his rescue. 'I really think he had a right to ask you that,' she said. 'Especially as I can see the end of my best drawing-pencil peeping out of your breast-pocket.'

'It's not yours, woman; it's mine!'

'Let me umpire this tug-of-war,' said Murdoch. 'I'm the fairest-minded man in all East Anglia.'

'Keep out of this, Murdoch!' I warned him.

'Oh, forget it, chaps, for Christ's sake!' said Dick. 'If we're going to squabble about matches and pencils on the very first night of our sail...'

Under the influence of the Domecq, which everyone praised, we soon recovered our self-possession -- but half an hour later, when we had finished washing-up and were going on deck, Bunny looked at me curiously.

'Who hung the corkscrew on that hook?' he asked. 'Did you?'

'Captain Murdoch has a devious sense of humour,' I told him, 'and if you find yourself catching it, lay off!' But a cold shiver went through me and I stayed below for a supplementary drink. The blasted thing was dangling from a hook above the galley-door. If I had been sure who the practical joker was, I'd have heaved him overboard.

For the sake of peace Dick must have asked the others not to comment on the corkscrew's reappearance, because the next day there was an eloquent silence, unbroken by myself, when I borrowed Dick's knife to uncork another bottle of claret. But for the rest of the holiday I was careful to go through my pockets, morning, afternoon and night, to make sure that I had left enough matches and pencils lying about for general use. I had a superstitious feeling that, if I did, the corkscrew would stay on its hook. And I was right.

I am a little vague about where we went, or what weather we had; but I know that when the time came to say goodbye, Alice couldn't resist asking: 'Haven't you forgotten your trick corkscrew? It's still hanging up in the saloon.'

'No,' I said. 'It isn't mine and never was. The Greenyer-Thoms left it here. Anyhow, Psyche can do with an ivory-handled corkscrew.'

'Thank you,' said Alice quizzically. 'But I don't think Borley intended it for us.'

That evening, back in my flat, I found that in the hurry of my departure I had forgotten to frisk myself for matches and pencils. Among the day's collection I found an outsize box of Swan Vestas boldly marked in ink John Murdoch, his property; please return to the Guards Club, and Alice's double-B Koh-i-Noor pencil with her initials burned on it -- with a red-hot knitting needle? -- at both ends and in the middle. This made me cross. 'Bunny must have planted them on me,' I reassured myself. 'It couldn't have been Murdoch -- he went off yesterday morning -- and Alice wouldn't have been so unkind.'

'Nice gentlemanly corkscrew you've brought back, Sir,' my Mrs Fiddle remarked as she bustled in with the soup.

'Oh, I have, have I?' I almost yelled. 'Then throw it out of the window!'

She looked at me with round, reproachful eyes. 'Oh, Sir, I could never do such a thing, Mr Massie, Sir. You can't buy a corkscrew like that nowadays.'

I jumped up. 'Then I'll have to throw it away myself. Where is it?'

'On the pantry-shelf, next to the egg-cups,' she answered resignedly, picking up my fallen napkin. 'But it seems such wicked waste.'

'Where did you say it was?' I called from the pantry. 'I don't see it.'

'Come back, Mr Massie, and eat your soup while it's hot,' she pleaded. 'The corkscrew can wait its turn, surely?'

Not wanting to look ridiculous, I came back and restrained myself until dessert, when I asked her curtly to fetch the thing.

She was away some little time and showed annoyance when she returned.

'You're making game of me, Sir. You've hid that corkscrew; you know you have.'

'I have done nothing of the sort, Mrs Fiddle.'

'There's only the two of us in the flat, Sir,' she said, pursing her lips.

'Correct, Mrs Fiddle. And if you want the corkscrew yourself, you're welcome to it, so long as you don't bring it back here. I should, of course, have offered it to Mr Fiddle before I talked of throwing it out of the window.'

'Are you accusing me of hiding it with intent to deceive you, Mr Massie?'

'Didn't you accuse me of that, just now?'

The thrust went home. 'I didn't mean anything rude, Sir, I'm sure,' she said, weakening.

'I should hope not. But, tell me, Mrs Fiddle, are you certain you saw a corkscrew? What was it like?'

'Ivory-handled, Sir, with a sort of shaving brush at one end, and a little round silver plate set in the other with some initials and a date.'

This was too much. 'That's the one,' I muttered, 'but, upon my word, I never noticed the initials.'

'Well, look again, Mr Massie, and see if I'm not right,' she said. And then, plaintively, as she retired into the kitchen with her apron to her eyes: 'But you oughtn't to pull my leg, Sir! I take things so seriously, ever since my little Shirley died.'

I poured her a drink, and we made peace.

Next day the corkscrew turned up in the pantry at the back of the napkin-drawer. Mrs Fiddle produced it in triumph. 'Here it is, Sir. Now see if I wasn't right about the initials.'

I took it gingerly from her, and there was the silver plate all right. I couldn't understand how I had missed it. F.C.C.B. 1928, the silver slightly tarnished.

'Yes, Sir, it could do with a nice rub-up.'

I saw no way out of this awkward situation but to earn credit as a practical joker. 'The fact is,' I blustered, 'I bought it at Lowestoft as a present for Mr Fiddle. I didn't intend you to see it, and that's why I made a bit of a mystery of the whole affair. I meant to keep it for his birthday. First of next month, isn't it?'

'No, Sir. Fiddle's birthday was the first of last month. Very kind of you, Sir, all the

same, I'm sure.'

But she still seemed dissatisfied. 'Fiddle isn't a wine or spirit drinker, Sir,' she explained after a pause, 'and bottled beer comes with screw-tops these days.'

'How very stupid of me! All right, let's chuck it out of the window, after all.'

'Oh, no, Sir! You might hurt someone passing in the street. Besides, it's a nice article. Keep it for yourself, and give Fiddle a couple of bottles of stout, instead. He'd take that very kindly, though belated. And so would I, if it comes to that, Mr Massie, Sir.'

Late that evening I walked along the Mall with a neat package in my hand until I came to Hammersmith Bridge. When no one was about, I hurled it into mid-stream. What a load off my mind! But that night I dreamed that a nasty-looking corpse floating in the water had grabbed the parcel just as it sank and shouted to me to come back and collect my property. He rose dripping from the Thames; it was F.C.C. Borley himself. I turned and fled screaming towards the Broadway, but he came after me. 'It's yours, you damned thief!' he bawled. 'Wait! I've brought it!' And then, as a parting shot, heard indistinctly through the rumble of traffic: 'And the Worser Part (Bins K to T) for Mr Reginald Massie.' That was the operative phrase in his will.

I awoke with chattering teeth, jumped out of bed, switched on all the lights in the flat, poured myself a stiff drink, and went along to see whether the corkscrew were back again on the pantry hook. Thank God, it wasn't!

I re-packed my suitcase and read myself to sleep again.

In the morning when Mrs Fiddle brought my tea I told her that I had been rung up by another set of yachting friends in South Devon, and was catching the morning train there. I'd send her a wire to let her know when I was returning, and what to do with my letters. This was nothing unusual; I frequently leave home on a sudden impulse.

I booked for Brixham, where I knew that a regatta was in progress. Also, a bachelor-uncle of mine lived on the hill overlooking the harbour: an ex-Marine Colonel whom I had not seen for years and whose chief interest was British freshwater molluscs. We exchanged cards at Christmas and his were always superscribed: 'Come and visit a lonely old man.' I thought: 'Here's my chance to show a little family feeling; besides, all the pubs are sure to be full because of the regatta.'

Uncle Tim was delighted to see me and discuss his molluscs and his rheumatism. That evening he took me in a taxi to the Yacht Club for an early supper. 'You look depressed, my boy,' he said, 'and not too well in spite of your holiday. You ought to get married. Man isn't meant to live by himself. Marriage would tone you up and give you a motive in life.' He added sadly: 'I put it off too long. Molluscs and marriage don't go

together. Children would have played the deuce with my aquarium and cabinets.'

'Oh, they grow up,' I said airily. 'Seven years' patience, and your collection would have been safe enough.'

'You may be right; but the poor little blighters couldn't wait.'

'Who? The children?'

'No, no, stupid! The molluscs!'

'I beg your pardon. But why ever not?'

'River pollution: those confounded chemical manures washed off the soil, you know. A regular massacre of the innocents: whole species destroyed every year.'

I shook my head in sympathy.

'But there's nothing to prevent you from marrying, is there?' he persisted.

'I collect matchboxes,' I answered, rattling my pockets gloomily. 'Mine is one of the finest collections in Europe. It would hardly be fair to bring up children among so much incendiary material, would it?'

Presently Uncle Tim, reaching for the menu, said that his rheumatism be damned: with our Dover sole and roast chicken we'd have a bottle of the Club's famous hock, tacitly reserved for resident members. 'I know that you appreciate a sound wine, Reginald,' he said. 'Not many young men do, with all these confounded mixed drinks about. Gin and vermouth -- gin and tonic -- gin and bitters: that's what it's come to. Even in the Navy. Pollution, I call it!' He finished enigmatically: 'Whole species destroyed every year.'

'Did you ever come across a youngster called Borley?' he went on. 'Chap I met once, here at the Club. He wore a floppy hat and an absurd tie like a Frenchman; said he was writing a book. A mind like a corkscrew -- went round and round, and in and in, and then pop! out would come something wet. But, for all that, he had a remarkable knowledge of wine; and consented to approve of our hock.'

A waiter tip-toed in, cradling the bottle, and ceremoniously dusted its neck with the brush at the end of an ivory-handled corkscrew. 'I've brought it, fellow-drinker,' he whispered with a confidential leer.

'Good Heavens, boy!' cried Uncle Tim. 'What's amiss? Are you taken ill?'

I had dashed out of the Club, and was half-running, half-flying, down the slope to the Fish Market. The evening crowds in Fore Street blocked my way but I swerved and zigzagged through them like an international wing-threequarter.

'Hey, Reggie, stop!' a woman shouted almost in my ear.

I handed her off and darted across the narrow street, where I found myself firmly tackled around the waist.

'For God's sake, Reggie, what's the hurry? Have you murdered someone?'

It was Dick Semphill! I stopped struggling and gaped at him. 'Come into this café and tell Alice and me what's happened.'

I followed him in, still gaping, and sat down. 'What on earth are you doing in Brixham?' I asked, when I found my voice.

'The regatta, of course,' Alice answered.

'But why aren't you up in Lowestoft?'

'That's not till next month. We've been here since Friday. Psyche's not distinguished herself yet, but there's still hope.'

'Psyche? But she can't possibly have sailed from Suffolk in the time!'

'I don't know what you're driving at. She's not been in the Broads since last year. You're coming up there next month -- at least we hope you are -- and we're going to have a wonderful time. By the way, you haven't yet told us whether Oulton Broad on the fifteenth suits you.'

'Where's Bunny?'

'At school in Somerset. Murdoch will collect him when he breaks up.'

'Dick -- Alice, I believe I'm going off my head.' I told them the whole story from the beginning, even making a clean breast of the matchbox business. They both looked thoroughly uncomfortable when I had finished.

Alice said: 'Obviously, it was a dream, but I can't make out exactly at what point it began and ended. Listen: I'll ring up the Yacht Club and find out if your Uncle Tim's there.'

The 'phone was close to our table. Presently I heard her say: 'You're sure? Not since

last Tuesday? Laid up with rheumatism? Oh, I'm so sorry. No, no message. Thanks very much.'

She put back the receiver. 'It's not so bad, Reggie,' she said. 'You haven't let your uncle down. As a matter of fact, they don't serve meals at the Yacht Club; and the only cellar there is the Commodore's personal bottle they keep under the counter. So your dream didn't end until Dick woke you up a moment ago. It was a bit more than a dream, of course; a sort of sleep-walk, probably due to worrying about that chap Borley. Lucky we met you. Do you mind turning out your pockets, Reggie, dear? That may give us a clue to how long you've been away from your flat.'

I obeyed dazedly. Out came eight matchboxes of different sorts, seven pencils and, among other odds and ends, the return half of a railway ticket from Paddington, and an unposted letter to Alice herself, written from my flat and confirming the Oulton Broad rendezvous.

'You came down here only this afternoon,' she said, showing me the date on the ticket.

There was also a bulky envelope containing all the documents concerned with my winding-up of Borley's affairs. Alice ran through them. 'I see you duly delivered the wine to the Warden and Fellows of Wadham College,' she said. 'And here's the itemized bill for the funeral at Kirtlington Parish Church. Oh, and a note from Squadron-leader Borley of Banbury, saying that if you'd like any souvenir from his cousin's effects before the auctioneer disposes of them, you're very welcome, but will you please let him know as soon as possible. He wrote on Thursday; I don't suppose you've answered him yet. Hullo, here's a photostat of the will itself! What beastly wriggly writing! Yes, it's witnessed by --'

Dick had kept quiet all this time. Now he grabbed the will and read it. 'It's all right, Reggie,' he said. 'You've not gone nuts, and we won't even have to get you psycho-analysed. You've merely been haunted -- by a ghost which it ought to be easy enough to lay.' Then he burst out: 'You dolt, why didn't you take the trouble to find out whether your friend Borley was a Protestant or a Catholic?'

'I did take a great deal of trouble, but nobody knew. Even the College couldn't tell me, so I followed the line of least resistance and had him buried C. of E.'

'Exactly. That's what all the trouble's been about ! You see now why in your dream he called you a damned thief?'

'I don't understand.'

'Read the will again. Read it aloud!'

I read:

I appoint Reginald Massie to be my executor... the Better Part of my Cellar (Bins A to J) are for the Warden and Fellows of Wadham College, Oxford. The Worser Part (Bins K to T) are for Mr Reginald Massie...

'Not "for Mr Reginald Massie," idiot; if he'd meant you he'd have written "the said Reginald Massie." It's "for the Requisite Masses"! Masses for his soul's repose, don't you see?'

The exhumation was not easy to wangle, hut I got it fixed up in the end. Then I handed over the wine to the St Aloysius people at Oxford and they agreed to do the rest. And on Alice's insistence, I wrote to Squadron-leader Borley, asking for the corkscrew as a keepsake. Since he sent it I haven't pocketed a single matchbox or pencil -- so far as I know, that is...