

# **The Nine Tailors: Changes Rung on an Old Theme in Two Short Touches and Two Full Peals Study Guide**

**The Nine Tailors: Changes Rung on an Old Theme in Two Short Touches and Two Full Peals by Dorothy L. Sayers**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Nine Tailors: Changes Rung on an Old Theme in Two Short Touches and Two Full Peals</a>	
<a href="#">Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">The Bells are Rung Up.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">The Bells in Their Courses.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Mr. Gotobed is Called with a Double.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Lord Peter is Taken from Lead and Makes Third Place.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Lord Peter Dodges with Mr. Blundell and Passes Him.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Tailor Paul is Called Before with a Single.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Monsieur Rozier Hunts the Treble down.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Plain Hunting.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Lord Peter Follows His Course Bell to Lead.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Emily Turns Bunter from Behind.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Lord Peter Is Called Wrong.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">The Quick Work.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Nobby Goes in Slow and Comes out Quick.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Will Thoday Goes in Quick and Comes out Slow.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">The Slow Work.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">The Dodging.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">The Waters are Called Out.....</a>	<a href="#">43</a>
<a href="#">The Waters are Called Home.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">The Bells are Rung Down.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>



Objects/Places..... 59  
Themes..... 64  
Style..... 69  
Quotes..... 73  
Topics for Discussion..... 75



## Plot Summary

After a disfigured corpse is discovered in the graveyard of Fenchurch St. Paul, Lord Peter Wimsey follows various clues to find the identity of the stranger and how he died, and unravel his link to a jewel theft that took place in the village.

Lord Peter has stayed with the Reverend Venables and helped him with the New Year Peal, so when Lady Thorpe's grave is reopened to reveal a corpse, the vicar calls Lord Peter in. Lord Peter learns of a jewel theft carried out by the thief Cranton and the butler Deacon many years ago, including the fact that a body identified as Deacon's was found after he broke out of prison and vanished. At first, all think that the corpse is Cranton (alias Driver) who disappeared from the village at about the same time as the corpse was put in the grave, which was probably just after New Year's Day.

Acting on a hunch, Wimsey finds a letter sent to a non-existent Paul Taylor that was sent from France. This letter, combined with French underclothing found on the corpse, takes Wimsey to France, where Suzanne LeGros identifies the clothes as having belonged to her missing English husband, but does not recognize Cranton as her husband.

Wimsey continues to investigate how the corpse was killed and the mentally handicapped Potty Peake reveals he saw Will Thoday (who married Deacon's widow) in the church on the critical night, leading Will and his sailor brother Jim to fall under suspicion. Hilary Thorpe sends Wimsey a piece of writing she found in the church, which proves to be a cipher letter that leads to the finding of the emeralds.

The Thoday family vanish and the police start hunting them, and they also find Cranton. Cranton reveals that Deacon had not died after breaking out of prison but had rather escaped to France. When the farm had fallen on hard times, Deacon had tried to return to England to recover the emeralds. After questioning the Thodays, they discover that Will Thoday had met Deacon in the church but could not turn him in, as this would reveal his marriage to Mary to be illegal, so Will Thoday had tied Deacon up in the bellchamber of the church. As Will fell ill, Jim had gone to get Will out of the country and found him dead, and it was Jim who had disfigured the corpse so it would not be recognized, and Jim who buried it. But neither Will or Jim had killed Deacon.

Much later, after a flood strikes the area, leading to the death of Will Thoday, Lord Peter realizes that Deacon had been tied in the bellchamber during the ringing of the nine-hour New Year peal and the vibrations of the bells and their high decibels had killed Deacon.



# The Bells are Rung Up

## The Bells are Rung Up Summary

After a car crash, Lord Peter Wimsey and Bunter walk to Fenchurch St. Paul, where they meet the vicar, the Reverend Venables and accept his offer of hospitality overnight while the car is being recovered and mended. When Venables learns that Will Thoday has influenza, he believes that he might have to abandon his plan of a nine-hour bellringing session. However, Lord Peter is able to take Will's place. The ringers gather and prepare for the night's peal.

## The Bells are Rung Up Analysis

This chapter has the primary function of introducing the setting, the motif or theme of bell-ringing, and several of the major characters. It also contains an explanation of change-ringing, where the author seems to be addressing the reader directly.

The first major characters to be introduced are Lord Peter Wimsey and his butler (or valet), Bunter. The very first page gives the reader vital information about these characters. Firstly, the reader can see, by his speech and his name, that Lord Peter is a member of the British aristocracy. One also sees that Lord Peter has a tendency to drive too quickly, and that he has a powerful car, itself an indication of his social status and wealth. When the two men begin walking, Lord Peter is obviously familiar with works of literature and can make allusions to them in moments of crisis. Bunter also promptly reveals his social class, and shows that he is deferential, polite and "correct" even immediately after a car accident. This suggests that Bunter has great self-control. Both men do not balk at a walk in freezing conditions, which suggests that although they are both members of a wealthy household, they are not "soft" and are capable of physical exertion. Later in the chapter, after Lord Peter has agreed to help the Reverend Venables in the New Year Peal, the reader learns that both he and Bunter have detective experience. Lord Peter's willingness to help out gives the reader a favorable impression of Lord Peter, as it suggests that he is kind and helpful.

The next major character to be introduced is the Reverend Theobald Venables. Immediately, the reader is struck by his kindness - although he is a stranger to Lord Peter and Bunter, he immediately invites them to stay the night after offering him a lift in his car, insisting on it when they protest. One also sees him in action - he has been visiting a sick parishoner to offer comfort, advice and practical assistance (note his mentioning that he intends to send around some wine to the invalid). His concern for the innkeepers and his desire to spare them trouble is obvious; his blowing of the horn as he approaches the house also shows his general concern for his fellow-humans as well as having a slightly comic tone. The second characteristic to strike the reader about the Reverend Venables is his obvious pride in his church and his almost childlike delight in its beauty. His casual mention of his Gospel of Nicodemus and his use of Latin phrases



in general conversation also suggest that he is intellectual. Further in the chapter, the reader clearly sees his passion for change-ringing. These factors combine to give the reader a very favorable impression of the Reverend Venables.

The fourth major character to be introduced is Mrs. Venables. She is presented to the reader as calm, considerate and practical, making a perfect counterfoil to her husband. Unlike him, she is less likely to be carried away by enthusiasm. However, she shares his kindness and consideration for other.

Other major characters are introduced, specifically Will Thoday and James Thoday, although they seem almost incidental at this point in the plot. The only thing the reader knows is that Will Thoday is a bell-ringer who has contracted influenza and that his brother is helping him. Will seems distressed by his inability to get to the church, but the reader does not understand the significance of this fact at this point.

Minor characters introduced include the other bell-ringers and the Venables' maidservant, Emily.

Another fact that the reader is given but does not realize the significance of at this stage is the vicar's inability to find his keys. This seems to have the function of showing us that the vicar can be muddled and disorganized - a fact that is complemented by his losing track of the time and being late for his dinner - but also proves to be crucial. The vicar's tardiness also seems to be emphasized by his desire to go into the bell-chamber, even though Jack Godfrey is impatiently jingling his keys. This trivial incident also proves to be highly ironic, as if the characters had entered the bell-chamber at that point, there would have been no mystery, as they would have found Jeff Deacon alive and a prisoner.

The setting of the novel is introduced, and the reader is shown the Fens with its drains, flat landscape and straight roads, all described vividly. The church is also introduced and its exterior is described. It is quite large and the interior at night is very dark, which makes the later mention of how Potty Peake could be in the church as a witness between Will Thoday and Jeff Deacon more plausible. The bells, with their names, are also introduced. At this point, the bells seem to be merely details to give local color and interest; later, the names of the bells and their significant role will be clarified.

The mention of the influenza epidemic also helps one to see the fictional events of the novel in their historical context. Obviously, the setting in time takes place after World War I, during the influenza epidemic/pandemic that affected much of the Western world during the 1920s.



# The Bells in Their Courses

## The Bells in Their Courses Summary

Mrs. Venables insists that Lord Peter rests before the all-night peal, and he wakes only just in time for the midnight service. After the service, Lord Peter, Reverend Venables and the other ringers ring a peal that they complete successfully in nine hours. As they come in for breakfast after the ring, the news comes that Lady Thorpe is dying, and the Reverend Venables hurries out. While Lord Peter's car is being salvaged from the ditch, Jenkins tells him about how an emerald necklace was once stolen from the Red House by the butler Jeff Deacon and his accomplice, the burglar Nobby Cranton, and how it ruined the family. After his car is repaired, Lord Peter leaves, meeting an ex-convict looking for work in Fenchurch St Paul on the road.

## The Bells in Their Courses Analysis

The most notable feature of this chapter is the ringing of the nine-hour New Year peal, which is described very evocatively and vividly, using onomatopoeia as one of its most dominant literary techniques to give an impression of what the bells sound like as they ring. While the description contains a lot of bell-ringing jargon, the reader does not need to understand what the technical terms mean to appreciate the passage. Other passages of description stand out in this chapter, especially the descriptions of the fen country and the drains, and the interior of the church. These details make the setting very realistic. As Dorothy Sawyers grew up in the Fen district where her father was an Anglican vicar, it is highly likely that she is drawing on her own memories and experiences to create the fictional setting. However, she mentions in the foreword to the novel that an architect friend helped her design the layout of the church and suggested the addition of the angel roof. In some of her other writings, Sawyers mentions the works of literature - including poetry - that she was influenced by when she wrote the lyrical passage describing the roof.

The bell-ringing scene is important thematically. Prior to the ringing of the peal, readers are given snippets of Reverend Venables' sermon, with its theme of praising God, and a description of the very beautiful gilded angel roof that even makes an impression on Lord Peter. This introduces the Christian themes in the novel, especially the idea that the bells are dedicated to God and are holy. The vicar's sermon also mentions that Lord Peter seemed to have been sent along at the last minute to enable the peal to be rung, which the vicar takes as an act of God. These two religious themes and the idea that the peal was meant to be rung prove to be important later in the plot.

The second important feature of this chapter is the back-story of the stolen emeralds. Although the story of the emeralds is given ostensibly as just an interesting fact about the Thorpe family, it creates an expectation in the mind of the reader: one knows that this novel is in the mystery genre, and the mention of the stolen emeralds suggests that



this old crime, which apparently was solved, will still be important and relevant. The appearance of the ex-convict at the end of the chapter also serves to create suspense and expectation in the reader: it is already clear that the jewels were never found and that Cranton has just been released from jail, so one wonders if the ex-convict is Cranton returning for the emeralds.

This story also introduces the character of Jeff Deacon and explains what all believe to be the truth about him: he stole the jewels with the help of Cranton, he broke out of prison after killing a warder, and a skeleton (presumably Deacon's) wearing prison clothes was found in a hole nearby two years later. The reader is also informed that Mary Thoday (formerly Mary Deacon) had been accused of being involved in the theft, and that she married Will Thoday shortly after learning that Jeff Deacon was officially dead. A comment by Mrs. Venables also shows that Will Thoday is highly sensitive about the old story, as it reflects badly on his wife, and he hates to hear it mentioned.

The church is described in great detail, which serves the purpose of mentioning that the vicar's keys are still missing. This detail seems trivial at the time, but later proves to be highly significant. This sort of subtle clue-planting is a characteristic feature of "whodunnit" type mystery novels of the old school. Another detail given that seems trivial at the time is the mention of the galleries that had once been in the church building.

The amount of space given to the description of the drains and canals in the Fens not only serves to make the description of the setting very realistic but also foreshadows the floods that will threaten the district.

The death of Lady Thorpe also seems almost incidental at the time, but later proves to be an essential part of the plot.

The constant activity of Reverend Venables is important thematically as it illustrates how he, as a representative of the church, works tirelessly for the people of his parish. This is very relevant to the theme of the role that the church plays in a community or in society, and refutes the comment by Lord Peter that "they say that Church of England parsons do nothing for their money."





# Mr. Gotobed is Called with a Double

## Mr. Gotobed is Called with a Double Summary

Before Easter, Hilary Thorpe is helping in the church when she finds a piece of French writing paper in the bell-chamber with esoteric writing on it, which she keeps. Shortly after, her father, Sir Henry, dies, also of influenza, expressing a regret that he has little to leave her because the family fortunes have been spent on recompensing Lady Wilbraham, the owner of the emerald necklace, for their loss. While Harry Gotobed and his son are re-opening Lady Thorpe's grave, they discover a strange man's body inside that has had the face beaten in and the hands removed. The vicar calls the police and writes to Lord Peter.

## Mr. Gotobed is Called with a Double Analysis

This chapter begins a new section in the novel, and it is here that the mystery begins.

The scene where Hilary Thorpe comes to the church to help Mrs. Venables has a number of functions. Firstly, the descriptions of the daffodils being placed in the church as Easter decorations are designed to show the passage of time since the previous chapter, highlighting that it is now springtime in contrast to the winter scenes that came before. This also allows the reader to see another part of church life, which is one of the themes of the novel. Secondly, this scene introduces Hilary Thorpe, and the scene in church allows us to see that she is a kind and considerate young woman who is generous with some of the advantages of her position - she volunteers the flowers from the garden of her stately home as well as the use of the family car (in a day when cars were rarer) and one of the Red House servants, as well as physically helping out. This gives the impression that Hilary Thorpe is similar in many ways to Lord Peter, which foreshadows how Lord Peter will later act as her mentor. These two generous aristocrats (Hilary Thorpe and Lord Peter) are contrasted with the greedy and grasping characters such as Deacon and Lady Wilbraham, which is part of the theme of greed.

The character of Mrs. Venables is also rounded out in the scene in the church, and the reader sees her as being a little more human - she suffers from arthritis and there are some things that she cannot tolerate, although she is very tolerant of her husband's habitual tardiness and mislaying things.

The scene where Hilary visits the bell-chamber is very important both for the plot and the theme. At this stage, the reader does not know the significance of the mysterious writing, but one suspects that it will have some significance. Readers are specifically told that it the paper is French - Hilary Thorpe is able to recognize the paper as French as her position meant that she had a French governess - which is another piece of foreshadowing about the French connection in the mystery. Thematically, Jack Godfrey's comments introduce the idea that the bells can be deadly as well as beautiful,



and specifically mentions that Batty Thomas is an unlucky bell and has killed two men in the past. This is also an example of foreshadowing, as the readers later learn that the bells were responsible for Jeff Deacon's death as well.

The scene in the bell-chamber reveals another aspect to Hilary's character: she can be determined and willful at times. Also, she is particularly fond of being around the bells. Given the belief that bells strike fear into sinners and evildoers, this suggests that Hilary Thorpe is an innocent young woman who is pious; this is borne out by her impromptu prayer when she sees her mother's grave and thinks of her father's severe illness.

The chapter seems to build up to the death of Sir Henry, first mentioning Hilary's concern for her father's condition and her prayer. The first hint is given when Hilary is introduced: she is wearing black in mourning for her mother, which is intended to remind the reader of Sir Henry's condition. The scene where Hilary sits by her father's bedside also builds up towards his inevitable death, as well as keeping the significance of the necklace in the reader's mind and showing again that Hilary is a determined young woman who is not greedy or materialistic. The specialist's words to Hilary and Dr. Baines also give the reader a sense of inevitability. When Reverend Venables hears Tailor Paul ringing, the reader can predict what has happened. The knelling of Tailor Paul and the way the sound can be heard throughout the parish shows again how the church was central to village life - the bell announces deaths in the parish and passes the news as soon as possible. However, the mood is kept light (rather than tragic) by touches of humor - the author's comment on the specialist's words to Hilary, the lighthearted conversation between Hilary and her father about writing school stories, and the peculiar beliefs of the cantankerous old lady.

The finding of the corpse is one of the key turning points of the plot. Immediately, the reader (and the characters) are presented with a number of questions, specifically who the man is, and who killed him buried him in Lady Thorpe's grave (and why they killed the mystery man). Both the reader and the characters link the body with the stranger who came looking for work, although, given the conventions of the mystery novel, the reader also expects that the explanation of the corpse's identity may not be that simple. The finding of the corpse is told in Gotobed's words rather than being shown first-hand, which means that the author has a legitimate way of avoiding grisly descriptions of what a three-month old mutilated corpse looks (and smells) like, as well as giving some insight into Gotobed's character. The finding of the corpse also stresses the importance of the church in community life - Gotobed notifies the vicar first of all - and also sheds some new light on Reverend Venables's character - although he can be muddled at times, when a crisis comes, he can be practical: he instantly notifies the police.

Hezekiah Lavender is also developed a little further, and his dogged insistence on ringing the peal properly for the dead man also adds a light touch to the scene, softening the horror and scandal of the mutilated body in the grave of Hilary's mother.



# Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt

## Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt Summary

Lord Peter comes to attend the inquest, where it is revealed that the corpse is possibly that of the ex-convict Lord Peter met on the road and that he did not die from the blows on the head, starvation or any recognizable cause of death, although the evidence suggests that he was tied up before he died and was mutilated afterward. The corpse is found to be wearing very worn and tattered French underclothing and to be carrying a French coin. The Wilderspains, who the ex-convict known as Steven Driver, also reveal that he had asked strange questions about the bells. Lord Peter begins to make notes on the case, writing a series of questions to be answered.

## Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt Analysis

The primary purpose of this chapter is to present the facts and to raise questions in the mind of the reader as well as in the minds of the characters. These questions are specifically stated and presented to the reader in the form of Lord Peter's notes. These questions create expectation in the reader, and one expects that all these questions will be answered, although one cannot be not sure at this stage how they will be answered. The only likely answer to any of the questions that is suggested to the reader is that the corpse is Steven Driver/Nobby Cranton, although the presence of the French coin and the French underclothes casts some doubt on this identification. All the ingredients for an old-school mystery novel are present: a series of difficult questions to solve and the presence of the detective protagonist.

Several vital pieces of information are given to the reader at this point. Some of these, the reader sees the significance of straight away, while others are more obscure or are even subtly given to the reader in a way that the reader is likely to overlook them, the latter being a characteristic of the "whodunnit" mystery novel. The vital pieces of information are that Tailor Paul has some significance and seems to be the key to some mystery known to the missing Stephen Driver; the corpse has some link with France; the vicar's set of keys can be used to get into all parts of the church, including the crypt where Gotobed keeps his tools; the corpse did not die from the blows on the head, starvation, strangulation or any other obvious cause; the mystery man was tied up before he died, possibly quite tightly, as the ropes had cut into his clothes and scratched his skin; Nobby Cranton is out of jail on parole but has not reported to his parole officer; and, Jeff Deacon was once a bell-ringer.

This chapter introduces the character of Superintendent Blundell, who is the policeman officially in charge of the case. Superintendent Blundell's character is not very well developed in this chapter. However, one learns that he is easy-going and cooperative, and is quite happy to have help from Lord Peter (who is, after all, more experienced as a detective). There is a suggestion that Blundell has a good sense of humor, as he



refers to the way that Lord Peter used to tease his retired colleague Sugg and how he appreciates Lord Peter's touch of humor.

The inquest scene, as well as presenting the reader with crucial facts about the mystery, also shows how tightly knit the village community is. The coroner seems to know everybody, and when some of the witnesses have a lapses in memory about things that would have been of interest to the community (funerals and the disappearance of Steven Driver), they are able to supply the information, even though they are reminded that this is out of order and not strictly legal. Touches of humor are included in the inquest, such as the appearance of Wally Pratt - already presented as a bungler - in the jury and muddling his right hand with his left, and the ludicrous proposal that the dead man might have taken Gotobed's tools and buried himself. This lighter tone to the inquest scene also serves to soften the potential horror of the situation.

The more flippant side of Lord Peter is shown in this chapter. He is presented as something of a connoisseur of mysteries and crime, and his reaction is not one of of shock, horror and sympathy, but of almost childlike glee and enthusiasm. However, as it is obvious that his activities as a private detective are helpful to others, this leaves the reader with a sympathetic view of Lord Peter - he finds helping other people with difficult problems to be a lot of fun, which strikes the reader as being part of his generous nature.

The details given about the bells are something of a "red herring" or distraction, as the mottoes on the bells prove to have no real significance to the plot. However, they do allow the bells, which are thematically important, to take on a character of their own.

The Reverend Venables' absentmindedness and tendency to lose things is shown in action several times in this chapter. This has the effect of distracting the reader from how the vicar could not find his keys in the first few chapters: one presumes that he mislaid them as he does the banns and the pamphlet about the bells.

Hezekiah's suggestion that all the trouble started with Jeff Deacon coming to work at the Red House seems ridiculous and simply part of a crusty old countryman's cantankerousness and suspicion of the unfamiliar. However, this proves to be a accurate statement.

The character of Potty Peake is shown for the first time. One learns that he is mentally handicapped, but he is cared for and tolerated by the community (for example, Gotobed dislikes the idea of committing Potty Peake to a mental institution and puts up with his intrusiveness and ghoulish description of the death. The reader also sees how he can creep up almost unnoticed.



# Lord Peter is Taken from Lead and Makes Third Place

## Lord Peter is Taken from Lead and Makes Third Place Summary

Lord Peter attends the funeral and ponders various points about the death, such as when the corpse was put into the grave and who might have been witnesses. He talks over some of these points with Hilary Thorpe, who suggests that Mrs. Gates might know when or if the grave was disturbed after her mother's funeral. Mr. Blundell then gives Lord Peter the full details on the history of the emeralds. Jeff Deacon had been in contact with the thief Cranton, so when he learned from Mary where the eccentric and greedy Mrs. Wilbraham hid her jewels, the two collaborate to steal the emeralds. It appears that Deacon cheated Cranton and tried to frame him as well. The emeralds were never found. Lord Peter and Sgt. Blundell feel certain that the corpse was Cranton and he was murdered for the emeralds. Will Thoday, who married Mary after a skeleton presumed to be Deacon's was found, is also acting suspiciously.

## Lord Peter is Taken from Lead and Makes Third Place Analysis

The main purpose of this chapter is to supply the backstory about the emeralds and the events of the past. This confirms for the reader that the dead man is something to do with the emeralds and the old theft. The backstory is not told in flashback, but is recounted by Blundell. Blundell does not reveal much of his personality during this recount, but is the perfect person to tell the full story already hinted at by Joe Hinkins, as he was officially in charge of the case and knows all the details, including the stories both Deacon and Cranton told before and after their arrests.

The backstory reveals a number of details about the character of Jeff Deacon, and the reader is not given a favorable impression of him. He betrayed his employer and abused a position of trust to steal the emeralds. He is a liar and a cheat and does not even hold to the tradition of "honour among thieves" and not turning one's accomplices into the police. His attempt to frame Cranton and make himself appear innocent gives the reader the impression that he is somewhat cowardly. The reader also learns that Deacon attempted to cheat Cranton as well as putting the blame on him (and/or Elsie) - Cranton claims that all that Deacon gave him was the jewel case (the reader has earlier learned that Sir Henry believed Cranton to be telling the truth). Deacon was a womaniser. The character of Deacon is blackened even further by the murder of the prison warder. When the reader learns that a skeleton wearing prison clothes with a smashed-in skull was found nearby, the reader feels that this is somehow appropriate and just.



This last point is the first introduction of the theme of divine justice and the idea put forward that God will not let a murderer go unpunished.

This story seems to suggest that Jeff Deacon is dead. This indeed is the official position. However, a very subtle detail is given: all that was found was a skeleton, and the identification of this skeleton as Deacon was based on the fact that it was wearing prison clothes and that the bones had been in the hole since Deacon disappeared. The reader is subtly led to make the same assumption as the official investigators: Jeff Deacon is dead.

The scene where Lord Peter attends the funeral is an excellent example of stream-of-consciousness narration. This is an attempt to represent the thoughts that go through a wandering mind observing something and mulling over a problem at the same time. This passage lets one see that Lord Peter dislikes the bells and is also an agnostic regarding religious belief, which subtly emphasizes the idea that sinners are afraid of the sound of church bells. However, it is also obvious that he is familiar with the traditions of the Anglican church. This passage also introduces a new question into the mind of the reader as well as that of Lord Peter: why was the dead man tied up and what has happened to the rope?

The exchange with Hilary Thorpe gives one a lot of insight into her character and personality, and one sees Lord Peter beginning to act as her mentor. Hilary specifically states that her late father would have got on well with Lord Peter and would have enjoyed the mystery. This suggests that Hilary is beginning to accept Lord Peter as a father-figure, which foreshadows how he will later act as trustee for the estate she inherits from Lady Wilbraham. It is suggested that Lord Peter would make a more suitable guardian for her than her legal guardian, the pompous and ultra-traditional Uncle Edward. It is also suggested that Hilary will play some role in solving the mystery, as she has the type of imagination and insight necessary to detective work, and she suggests that Mrs. Gates might have vital information, as well as helping to pinpoint the time that the body was buried.

Here, the theme of greed and materialism is put forward for the first time, although the reader has already encountered a number of examples of the opposite quality, generosity. This greed is primarily shown in the actions of Jeff Deacon, who is willing to lie, cheat and steal - and ultimately commit murder - for the sake of the emeralds. Lady Wilbraham is also an example of greed and materialism. She is depicted as a mean and avaricious woman who does not trust anyone with her valuables, and she accepts the payments from Sir Henry - who was not guilty - without any protest or consideration for his financial situation: she is much richer than he is to begin with. Sir Henry's actions are another example of generosity, as there was no legal need for him to have recompensed Lady Wilbraham for the theft. (Incidentally, the "bedroom utensil" mentioned is most probably a chamber pot or commode designed for relieving oneself in overnight in the days before indoor toilets were common, hence the amusement of Elsie, Mary, the judge and the jury. It may also be a subtle comment on Lady Wilbraham's greed.)



# Lord Peter Dodges with Mr. Blundell and Passes Him

## Lord Peter Dodges with Mr. Blundell and Passes Him Summary

Blundell interviews various villagers, including the snooty Mrs. Gates and the shrewish Mrs. Coppins, and concludes that the burial was done on the fifth of January - the day after Lady Thorpe's funeral. Lord Peter fishes in the churchyard well and pulls up a hat and some ropes which were once Gaude's bell-rope and were probably used to tie up the corpse, tying arms and ankles separately. Blundell questions the Thoday family and find that Will had desperately wanted to get to the church for the New Year peal and that James is not writing as many letters as usual. Lord Peter interviews the Ashtons and learns that Will Thoday took out a large sum of money from the bank on New Year's Eve and that he has been uncharacteristically furious with his daughters when they mention seeing lights in the graveyard.

## Lord Peter Dodges with Mr. Blundell and Passes Him Analysis

This chapter is mostly taken up with dialogue as the two investigators question the locals. The reader's interest during this chapter is maintained not only by the details gleaned via questioning but also by the different characters explored by the questioning. The portrait of the very class-conscious Mrs. Gates also has a touch of humor.

From the perspective of the mystery, the following facts are given. Some of these facts seem relevant immediately; the significance of others is more obscure at this point. These include the following: the burial of the mystery man took place on the night after Lady Thorpe's funeral, as indicated by the Thoday girls seeing lights in the churchyard at that time, and the moving of the wreaths; Will Thoday took out a large sum of money from the bank supposedly for Sir Henry just before New Year, even though Will was falling ill at the time and Sir Henry would never have sent a sick man on a journey to Walbeach. The bank was not the one that Sir Henry usually banks his money at, and the money was later redeposited; Will Thoday is very sensitive about Mary's past and her connection with the Wilbraham emeralds and does not like to hear it mentioned; James Thoday seems to have changed character somewhat, as he now only sends postcards instead of long letters. Mary thinks this is unusual, but Will seems unconcerned; Will is unusually angry with his girls when they mention the lights in the churchyard; Will had been very eager to get to the church during the New Year peal and afterward, and mentioned both the Wilbraham emerald affair and the peal when he was delirious with flu and pneumonia; and finally, the rope used to tie the corpse before his death came from the church - it was one of the old bell-ropes.



The interview with Mrs. Gates lets the reader see Blundell's tact in handling difficult people as well as other aspects of his character. It is clear that he has a sense of humor, as shown by his eager anticipation of sharing his experience with Mrs. Gates with his wife as well as with Lord Peter. He shows himself to be quick-thinking as he comes up with a story that soothes the easily-offended feelings of Mrs. Gates and flatters her.

The chapter shows a strong contrast between the minor characters. Mrs. Gates is by far the most memorable of the three minor characters and the caricature of a highly class-conscious, fussy and interfering housekeeper is very vivid, and possibly borders on exaggeration. Her almost upper-class unpleasantness and fussiness is contrasted with the lower-class shrewishness of Mrs. Coppins. Of the two, Mrs. Coppins appears as the more sympathetic character, as she indicates that she gave the large wreath out of gratitude to the Thorpe family, rather than acting self-consciously like Mrs. Gates - the fault Mrs. Gates accuses Mrs. Coppins of. In this brief section, the reader has a picture of an ongoing feud between the two women, which adds extra realism to the book, as it shows that not everything is ideal and harmonious in the village. But both these characters are much less sympathetic than the portrait of the Ashtons. This middle-aged man and woman are portrayed as down-to-earth, friendly and kind. They reflect the more harmonious side of village life, where the neighbors all know each other very well and help each other out. This is best shown by the account of how Polly Ashton (the daughter of the couple) comforts Rosie Thoday and helps her run errands when she is afraid.

This chapter also gives us a lot of insight into two of the major characters: Mary and Will Thoday. They seem to have an excellent relationship, even though Will appears to have a hot temper and to be over-sensitive about his wife's past. Mary, by contrast, does not seem to flinch at mentioning her former brush with the law, and it is Will who becomes angry and forbids her mentioning it. At first reading, this simply seems to suggest that Will is very protective of Mary, but later on, it is clear that he also does not want to think about the Wilbraham emeralds and Jeff Deacon, as he knows Jeff Deacon is the dead man. The reader's attention is also drawn to Mary hesitating before mentioning that she never left her husband's side, which seems suspicious. One also learns that Will had been very close to his brother James, but this relationship seems to have cooled. Blundell makes the assumption that James may have become a bit too friendly with Mary and that this has been causing some trouble in the relationship; later, one finds out the real reason why the brothers are gradually becoming estranged: each thinks that the other has killed Jeff Deacon. One further hint is given that Will's temper is out of character regarding mention of the lights in the graveyard, the night of the New Year peal and the emeralds: Mrs. Ashton states that he is usually a very kind man, with the implication that he does not normally physically punish his daughters. This change of temper is put down to his recent illness, but the full relevance of Will's sensitivity is later made clear.

This initial suspicion thrown on the Thoday family seems to follow one of the conventions of mystery fiction. The reader is supposed to assume that Thoday is the obvious suspect, as he obviously knows something about what went on that night, even





though he was ill at the time. The usual convention for mystery fiction is that the obvious suspect is always innocent of the crime. The reader is tempted into reasoning that because Will is the obvious suspect, he is therefore innocent.

Another important character to make an appearance is Potty Peake. Here, he is talking enigmatically about ropes and "Number Nine". Although Lord Peter (and the reader) are told that Potty Peake is unreliable when he talks about ropes and hanging, his mention of "Number Nine" and that "somebody might be listening" foreshadow Potty's later role in solving the mystery.

The scene where Lord Peter and Blundell fish the ropes and the hat out of the well allow the reader to see Lord Peter's combination of flippant humor and detective intelligence combining again. One also sees evidence of his extensive education, as he glibly throws quotes and allusions throughout his speech, alongside Latin phrases (which are, incidentally, also classical allusions).

The importance and significance of the church bells is maintained, both in the mention of how distresses Will was during the New Year peal when he was ill, and also in how it was a bell-rope used for tying the corpse up.



# Tailor Paul is Called Before with a Single

## Tailor Paul is Called Before with a Single Summary

Wimsey inspects the French underclothes, and Mrs. Venables suggests that the man who owned them was married, came from France and had the British clothes as a disguise. Lord Peter and Bunter go to Leamholt and then Walbeach to see if any mail was left for Stephen Driver. Bunter learns that a letter has come from France for Paul Taylor and has been there some time. Bunter obtains the letter, claiming that "Paul Taylor" was his chauffeur. They drive back past the sluice gates, listening to the sluice-keeper complain about the state of his gates. They read the letter with Blundell. It is from a French peasant woman to her husband, and the details in the letter eliminate Cranton as the corpse.

## Tailor Paul is Called Before with a Single Analysis

In this chapter, the French connection with the mystery is introduced properly and one of the questions originally asked by Lord Peter is answered: the corpse is not Cranton.

The possibility of a French connection is first raised by Mrs. Venables, and it is here that she makes her greatest contribution to the solution of the mystery. She prepares the reader for the appearance of the French wife, making Lord Peter's actions in going to Leamholt and to Walbeach more plausible. Her inspection of the underclothing leads her to make the suggestion that the man who wore them had a wife, as indicated by the extensive mending and repairs done to the vest, and that the man who wore them had his British clothes as a disguise. She also suggests that the man Lord Peter met on the road was not the corpse. All her predictions are proven to be true. Lord Peter, up to this point, had been concentrating on the idea that the corpse was Cranton. Here, one has the first suggestion that Cranton is not the corpse, and the announcement of this fact is the climax of this chapter.

This part played by Mrs. Venables makes Lord Peter somewhat more realistic. He is no classical Sherlock Holmes who makes deductions that nobody else can. He can make mistakes and he needs the help of other people when solving a mystery.

The "coincidence" of the letter coming to light is made plausible by Mrs. Venables' suggestions, and also by the fact that the letter is addressed to "Paul Taylor", the person whom Stephen Driver was asking for when he was in the village.

This chapter reveals the following points that contribute to the solution of the mystery, although some points are not immediately relevant: the corpse had lived in France for some time in an area close to where a major battle of World War I was fought; Cranton was in jail nine years ago, and was in jail again too recently for him to have been the person - presumably the corpse - to whom the letter was written; the person to whom



the letter was written has some connection with the war and military service; and, the farm in France has fallen on hard financial times.

The scene where Bunter obtains the letter allows us to learn a little more of Bunter's character, even though the scene is reported indirectly in Bunter's characteristically deferential and formal manner; it is implied that his tone is quite different when he banters with the girl in the post office. This unseen side to Bunter's character, alongside his ability to do impersonations, is hinted at earlier when Mrs. Venables reports how well Bunter is getting on with the Rectory servants. In the post office, Bunter is shown to be quick-witted and slightly devious in his actions. It is unclear exactly why Bunter is given the task of asking for a letter left for Stephen Driver, but it is possible that he is more suited for the task, as it is possible that a more public figure like Lord Peter Wimsey could be recognized; Bunter, however, can easily pass himself off as another man.

The setting is described extensively in this chapter. The reader can see the importance that market days have on rural life - the animals brought to market block traffic in the market town, and the other towns seem deserted. But the influence of the system of canals and dykes is highlighted. The conversation with the sluice-keeper seems merely to be part of rounding out and adding realism to the setting, when it does not touch on the mysterious Stephen Driver. However, the mention of the neglected gates foreshadows the flood that will later strike the district.

The character of Mrs. Venables is rounded out again, and we learn that she has a soft spot for Lord Peter, caring for his welfare as if she was his mother.

The use of "Paul Taylor" as the pseudonym of the letter's recipient keeps the church bells in the mind of the reader, which stresses their thematic importance.



# Monsieur Rozier Hunts the Treble down

## Monsieur Rozier Hunts the Treble down Summary

Lord Peter travels to France, where M. Rozier introduces him to the peasant woman Suzanne LeGros. Suzanne recognizes the underclothes as belonging to her missing husband and explains how during the war she found a wounded soldier, an Englishman, who had deserted the army. She had nursed him back to health and had given him a name (Jean LeGros) and a new life as her husband, helping her manage the farm. He had returned to England when the farm fell on hard times to get property, although this was risky for him. She believes that her husband is at risk of being shot as a deserter from the army. She does not recognize the photo of Cranton and does not know the real name of her husband.

## Monsieur Rozier Hunts the Treble down Analysis

This chapter reveals the identity of the corpse as Jean LeGros, but introduces a new mystery: who was Jean LeGros before World War I, and what was his real name? Cranton is now put forward as the most likely suspect for committing the crime and burying the corpse. The manner of the death is still kept as a mystery, and this puzzle is reinforced in the reader's mind by some of the conversation between Lord Peter and M. Rozier: although it looks as if the corpse simply died of a stroke rather than by poison, violence or starvation, someone buried him secretly and mutilated the corpse. The link with the emeralds is also stressed - the mysterious behaviour of Cranton and LeGros's need for money seem to stress this. It is suggested here that LeGros was once in prison with Jeff Deacon and learned about the emeralds, then assisted Jeff Deacon to break prison before killing him. The possibility that LeGros is a murderer is suggested by Suzanne's fears that he will be shot by the military authorities and her reluctance to betray her husband. While it is clear that Suzanne genuinely believes this story, Lord Peter and M. Rozier know that deserters have been given an amnesty and are in no danger. However, if LeGros was a murderer, he would be a wanted man who faced the death penalty if caught.

The French connection also widens the scope of the mystery. It is no longer a local affair but international, and Scotland Yard is called in.

This last point leaves the reader with an unfavorable impression of Jean LeGros: he has been unwilling to tell his wife his true name and his past, and he has obviously lied to her. Suzanne, however, appears as a very sympathetic character: she is loyal to her husband, hard-working and kindly, as shown by her willingness to take in a wounded stranger and nurse him back to health. Again, the portrait of Suzanne LeGros is well-drawn and memorable, even though this is the only chapter in which she appears.



The language used in this chapter has a distinct character that contrasts with the style and vocabulary used in other chapters. This is done deliberately to remind the reader that the conversations reported here would have been conducted in French rather than English, and the slightly unusual choice of words and sentence structure is intended to hint at a translation (Dorothy Sawyers was fluent in French and in one of her other novels, a crucial letter is presented in perfect French and the translation was only included at the insistence of her editor. Sawyers was also an accomplished translator of literature). A good contrast between the "English" style and the "French" style is found in Lord Peter's speech to M. Rozier in contrast with his speech to Mr. Blundell.

This contrast in language use also highlights another fact about Lord Peter: it stresses his intelligence and good education to the reader, as he is obviously fluent in conversational French. Other points raised about Lord Peter's character in this chapter is his wealth - he can easily afford to travel to France - and his generosity - he offers to do so at his own expense, saving the British police force money. There is also a hint that Lord Peter saw active war service during World War I - notice his reaction when he learns that LeGros seems to remember nothing about the war. It is also clear that he has an appreciation of good food and wine, which makes it easy for him to make friends with M. Rozier easily.

M. Rozier is not a very well-rounded character and only makes this brief appearance. In many ways, he is presented as an archetypal Frenchman, indulgently tolerant about the romance between Suzanne and the mysterious LeGros, and appreciative of good food and wine.

This chapter has some historical interest, as the portrait of Suzanne LeGros illustrates the effect that World War I had on the people of France where much of the fighting took place. One can see how Suzanne had taken responsibility for the farm almost singlehandedly after many of the men in her family - her father, her brother and her fiancé - had all been killed during the warfare. Her village escaped being devastated by bombing, which implies that other villages did not, and the countryside was often disrupted by large numbers of retreating soldiers pouring through. It is hinted, too, that Suzanne had been desperate for help on the farm, so the sudden appearance of a fit, healthy man is very welcome for practical as well as romantic reasons, even though it is possible at first that he could have been a German and an enemy. This emphasizes how many young men lost their lives in the trenches and how this completely altered society.



# Plain Hunting

## Plain Hunting Summary

Lord Peter and Blundell are discussing the possible guilt of the Thodays (Jim, Will and Mary) when Potty Peake reveals that he saw Will Thoday in the church with the dead stranger, and this story appears plausible. However, Will cannot be the person who buried LeGros, as he was badly ill at the time. Hilary Thorpe sends Lord Peter the mysterious paper she found in the bell chamber; the paper this message was written on is the same sort as Suzanne used to write her letter. Lord Peter guesses that the message is a cipher sent by LeGros. News comes that Cranton has been found.

## Plain Hunting Analysis

This chapter raises a lot of possibilities and raises more questions. The specific question that the reader is confronted with is the part played by the Thoday family: it is obvious that they know something about the dead man (now identified as LeGros, although the true identity of LeGros is a question that is played down in this chapter), although it is not clear how they could have played a role: Will was sick when the man was buried and Mary is not strong enough to have carried the body down the ladder and buried it. James Thoday is implicated along with the rest of the family, although it is revealed that he was not the person who tied LeGros up: the knots in the ropes (as originally suggested by Blundell) were not tied by a sailor, who is usually an expert knot-tier. However, Cranton is also implicated, as his behaviour is also suspicious.

The most prominent question raised by this chapter is the reappearance of the cipher message. The type of paper used - which the reader has earlier been told is French paper - links the writing with LeGros and presumably with the emeralds - one was told in the previous chapter that LeGros spent a long time composing a "guarantee" for his English confederate - although the reader cannot know at this stage who that confederate was. This presents the reader with a new question: what does the cipher mean? One assumption that the reader (and Lord Peter) make is that the cipher leads to the hiding place of the emeralds. Another assumption that is made in this chapter is that the cipher was solved and the murder of LeGros was done in order to obtain the emeralds. It is obvious, however, that one question that has been in the minds of the police is what has now happened to the emeralds, as they have not appeared in the European or English markets (this, incidentally, indicates that this mystery is not only being worked on by Blundell and Lord Peter; the wider police network is involved as well). The assumption made by the police and given to the reader is that James Thoday took the emeralds and has sold them in the Asian market.

The reader's attention is drawn to the money that Will Thoday took out from the bank but later redeposited unused. The reader is given Will's story as to why he did it, but the police (and the readers) are still suspicious. The link between Thoday and LeGros is



unclear, as Will is unlikely to be able to obtain false papers, and has not been showing any sign of suspicious behaviour until after LeGros leaves France. This is left as a puzzle to the reader.

The reader is given the cipher and two of the methods cannot be used to crack it. The reader is also given a very subtle hint as to how the cipher can be cracked: one is shown the Reverend Venables "pricking out" a peal, which is the method that ultimately will be used to crack the cipher. This is also an example of foreshadowing. Readers can, if they choose, attempt to decipher the message for themselves. Again, this is a feature of the "whodunnit" type of mystery novel, where the book is a type of puzzle where reader attempts to puzzle out the clues and solve the mystery alongside the characters if they choose.

Potty Peake plays his most vital role in this chapter, where he gives definite evidence that Will Thoday was in the church with LeGros. Again, this reported evidence reveals information about the speaker's character, in this case Potty Peake. The picture given of Potty creeping into the church to be thankful for his dinner is touching and sympathetic. Potty's piety and his assertion that money leads to wickedness are also thematically important: his simple faith is contrasted with the greed and materialism of the less sympathetic characters.

Little else new is revealed about the characters in this chapter. As the title suggests, this chapter is more about "Plain Hunting" and the main focus is on the questions raised by the mystery. However, see that not only Lord Peter but also Bunter has a good education and can recognise the writing style of Gothic novelist Sheridan Le Fanu. One can also see the similarities between Lord Peter and Hilary Thorpe, who also plays a key role here. Furthermore, it is shown how Hilary seems to be taking Lord Peter as a mentor, as it is obvious that she does not get on well with Uncle Henry, her legal guardian. This relationship between Hilary and Lord Peter is one of the few relationships that grows and changes in nature during the course of the book.



# Lord Peter Follows His Course Bell to Lead

## Lord Peter Follows His Course Bell to Lead Summary

Lord Peter and Chief Inspector Parker interrogate Nobby Cranton, who is in a hospital. He claims that Deacon told him in the dock where the emeralds were hidden and that he had come to Fenchurch St. Paul to find them. On being confronted with the cipher letter, he reacts violently, nearly having a heart attack. He denies knowing or killing LeGros and passes out. Lord Peter returns to Fenchurch St Paul, investigating the keys and inside the bell chamber itself. He works on the cipher, with the help of the Reverend Venables and a method of bell-ringing, and solves it to give three verses from the Psalms that also seem baffling.

## Lord Peter Follows His Course Bell to Lead Analysis

The character of Nobby Cranton is presented to the reader for the first time. He is cheeky and goodnatured to the police and does not seem to show any resentment towards them. His tone towards Parker is almost one of reproach and rebuke for mistakes (such as accusing him of having had the emeralds) or slowness (taking several months to track him down after Nobby failed to report to his parole officer). He demonstrates a good sense of humour and appears as a quite sympathetic character. His tone changes abruptly when confronted with the cipher paper, and he also reacts with some strong negative emotion when Jeff Deacon is mentioned. His reaction when confronted with the cipher paper is one of shock and fear, and his frantic denials (and his subsequent faint) appear to be motivated by fear rather than anger. The reason for this fear is left open-ended: it is possibly that his fear is fear of being accused and hanged for murder, but it could have another reason.

Nobby Cranton's physical frailty has a subtle purpose: as he is obviously a weak little man with a heart condition, this leads the reader to conclude that Nobby Cranton cannot be the one who killed LeGros and carried the body down the ladder - he is not strong enough to do so. However, it is obvious that he is holding something back from the police. It is also clearly stated that the heart condition is a result of rheumatic fever contracted after leaving Fenchurch St Paul and falling into a dike.

Nobby Cranton also reveals more about Mary's character: he maintains that she is and was honest.

When the three investigators (Lord Peter, Parker and Blundell) discuss the interview with Cranton, it is made clear to them, as well as the reader, that whoever tied up LeGros was familiar with the church (whoever tied him up knew that a bell-rope could be found in the cope-chest) and where to find Gotobed's tools; Cranton is unlikely to





have known these things. If the reader bears in mind the evidence given by Potty Peake in the previous chapter, Will Thoday is at least partially implicated.

Next, one's attention is drawn to the keys to the belfry. Up until this point, the reader has been led to believe that the vicar's keys in the first two chapters were missing because of the vicar's absent-mindedness. In this chapter, the reader is led to believe that the keys were, during this time, in the possession of whoever tied up LeGros. However, this is also subtle evidence that a local person took the keys: an outsider like Cranton would not have been familiar with the vicar's absent-mindedness and would have been less likely to take the keys (if the vicar was more organized, the keys would have been missed), but a local would know that the vicar would not consider missing keys to be odd or unusual.

The reader's interest and focus shifts to the cipher message. This reveals more about Lord Peter's character. Although the reader is not shown his initial attempts with the cipher directly, one can see that he is persistent (he keeps trying with the cipher) and imaginative (he goes into the bell chamber to see if any key to the cipher could be found in there) as well as intelligent (solving ciphers using mathematical and logical methods requires a significant amount of mental discipline). The cipher also reveals something about LeGros: the cipher is not easily broken, which indicates (along with the sophisticated literary style of the passage) that the writer was quite clever.

The scene where Lord Peter explores the bell chamber contrasts in many ways with the scene where Hilary Thorpe is in the same place. Here, the atmosphere is eerie and slightly sinister. Lord Peter is seen here at his most imaginative, visualizing how the murder might have happened. It is also clear that he, an agnostic, is uneasy around the church bells, which ties in with the concept that church bells are sacred and sinners (which would include the non-believing Lord Peter) are afraid of them. This is in contrast with the ease and familiarity that the more religious Hilary Thorpe and Jack Godfrey show around the bells. The finding of the bottle also shows us Lord Peter's common sense: although he knows that the bottle's presence could have an innocent explanation, he still picks it up carefully in case it has finger prints.

The bottle's significance is left unclear but will later be proved to have some connection with the crime.

The fact that the vicar helps solve the cipher owing to his short-sightedness also reveals the more fallible side of Lord Peter. He is not some super-sleuth who amazes everyone with his superb competence and intelligence, but is human and needs the help of others. The part where Lord Peter thinks out how bell-ringing could be used to make a cipher explains the method to the reader as well as to the Reverend Venables, and prepares the reader for the technique to be used (and also gives enough information for readers to use this form of cipher themselves if they wish to). The fact that the cipher uses a method of change-ringing and that Cranton was told to "ask Tailor Paul" indicates that the cipher was originally written by someone who was a ringer (who could ring Kent Treble Bob) and was familiar with the names of the bells in Fenchurch St Paul. This begins to hint at the true identity of LeGros.



After the cipher is solved to reveal three unconnected verses in the psalms, one can see both Lord Peter and the vicar puzzled as to their meaning. However, a reader who wishes to solve the clues for him/herself could use information already given in the text to deduce where the emeralds are hidden.

The Reverend Venables draws a moral lesson from how his failing eyesight led to the solving of the cipher. This lesson is linked with the idea of Providence and divine justice. A reader who is a Bible student (as was Dorothy Sayers) could link this with various passages in Paul's epistles where the apostle hints at his own short-sightedness and writes how this physical weakness is given to him for a purpose. It is implied that this short-sightedness of the vicar is similar and is part of Divine Justice working to put things right and see the guilty punished.



# Emily Turns Bunter from Behind

## Emily Turns Bunter from Behind Summary

Emily approaches Mrs. Venables in tears because Bunter has spoken to her angrily for dusting the bottle found by Lord Peter, removing any potential fingerprints, which appears suspicious, as she is a close relative of Mary Thoday. Lord Peter makes inquiries around the various pubs in the area and finds that the Thodays ordered several bottles of the type found in the bell chamber. Lord Peter reveals to Mary Thoday that "Stephen Driver" was Nobby Cranton, and she is astonished. Lord Peter confronts her with the cipher letter and she appears to recognize the writing, although she denies it and appears horror-stricken.

## Emily Turns Bunter from Behind Analysis

At this stage in the mystery, the police are assuming that LeGros in his life in England was in prison alongside Jeff Deacon and learned of the whereabouts of the emeralds from him. This inspires them to send the cipher letter to the prison so that the handwriting can be identified to reveal the true identity of LeGros. This has the effect of building suspense: we know the question will be answered, but we know we will have to wait.

The bottle appears to be something of a red herring, even though it is linked with the Thoday family. As the beer was officially bought for James Thoday, he now becomes the main suspect, and the official process is set in place to trace him down and return him to England. This also has the effect of building suspense in the reader: again, the reader will have to wait some time before James Thoday tells his story.

Suspense and anticipation are also created by the mention that Blundell expects to hear from M. Rozier again with more information.

The scene in the Thoday household reveals some vital clues. The most obvious one is Mary's obvious recognition of the handwriting followed by her horrified denial and preoccupation. The second appears more innocent, although the reader's interest is drawn to them by Lord Peter's musings on them.

More of Mary Thoday's character is revealed in her conversation with Lord Peter. She appears to be a woman who is loyal and thinks well of everyone she knows - she seems to honestly believe that her husband was tempted by Cranton and that Cranton hid the emeralds. This seems to be in direct contradiction to Cranton's story as well as what the police (especially Blundell) believe. If one chooses to believe that Deacon did indeed double-cross Cranton and hide the emeralds, this has the effect of making Mary appear somewhat naive and over-trusting, and possibly a little stupid. This idea of Mary being trustingly naive but honest is consistent with her previous actions: she was the one who innocently revealed Lady Wilbraham's hiding place for the emeralds to her husband.



Another inconsistency appears between the stories told by Mary and Cranton: Cranton claims that he left Fenchurch St Paul in a hurry because he thought Mary Thoday had penetrated his disguise, but Mary appears to be genuinely surprised to learn that "Stephen Driver" was actually Cranton. She does not appear to be acting - it is impossible to turn pale, as Mary does, as a reaction just by wanting to.

Mary's horror and preoccupation after seeing the cipher letter is highly suggestive and a thoughtful reader could, at this point, deduce the truth about LeGros from her reaction.

This chapter also contains more examples of the close-knit nature of village life. The most notable example of this is the way that Emily and Mary are related, which stresses that the ties binding village people in the period the novel is set in are not just social ties but blood ties. The possible disadvantages of this are mentioned by Mrs. Venables, who attributes Potty Peake's mental handicap to too much in-breeding in the village, and she seems to welcome contact and exchange with the wider community, which seems to contrast with the attitude of, for example, Hezekiah Lavender. Another example of this close-knit society in action is shown by the innkeepers, who seem to know the domestic details about their customers, such as who cures their own bacon and who prefers which kind of beer.

Historically, this chapter is interesting, as it shows how wider social changes affect the common people. It is shown how the introduction of motorized transport means that people are more mobile and look for marriage partners further afield than their home village. There is also the introduction of pre-packaged foodstuffs and drink affecting the older ways of home brewing and home curing. And the financial hardships of the Depression era are also hinted at.

The parrot plays a role in this chapter, but it is given its comic side as well as a serious one: the reader is told that it swears inappropriately and it can be seen producing loud squawks and phrases at a crucial moment, breaking the tension that arises after Lord Peter shows Mary the paper. This, incidentally, gives Mary a chance to recover and to think, which is likely to lead to her denial.

The early part of the chapter reveals more about Bunter's character and reports that he is not always as proper and restrained as he is when the reader can see him in action: one learns that he can display a formidable temper. In some ways, it is a little unsatisfactory that one isn't shown this scene where he upbraids Emily. Bunter's interaction with Mrs. Venables also reveals something about Mrs. Venables' character: her practical outlook on life can give her courage when needed. Although she is somewhat intimidated by Bunter's manner, she is aware that, technically speaking, she is his social superior and has the authority to confront him. It is interesting that this minor conflict is resolved by Lord Peter, whose cheerful friendliness (and even higher social status) reconciles the three and reassures Emily so she no longer wants to resign.



# Lord Peter Is Called Wrong

## Lord Peter Is Called Wrong Summary

Lord Peter remembers how some carved cherubim he once encountered had holes behind, and also remembers that the church once had mezzanine galleries. On learning that the Red House servants once sat in these galleries in the south aisle, he realizes the significance of the verses revealed by the cipher: Jeff Deacon would have hidden the emeralds in one of these holes.

News comes that the cipher was in Jeff Deacon's handwriting, which is followed by the disappearance of the Thodays. News comes from France that LeGros's identity discs were found: the name on them was Arthur Cobbleigh, who lived near the wood where Deacon escaped from prison and where the skeleton wearing prison clothes was found.

Lord Peter goes to see if a hole exists behind the cherubim. He expects to find it empty but finds the emeralds still there.

## Lord Peter Is Called Wrong Analysis

This chapter takes place mostly within the church, again stressing the importance of this place.

The strange behaviour of the Thodays requires some explanation to understand the full significance. The service that they miss, Early Service, was a communion service, but the one they do attend is not; according to the tenets of the Anglican/Episcopalian church (at least in the time that this novel was set), someone who was living a sinful lifestyle should not take communion. Readers who are aware of this point may be able to guess the significance of their actions, particularly the actions of Mary. Mary's character appears particularly changed: she is also downcast and miserable, in contrast to her previous cheerfulness and openness. It is suggested that she and Will are both miserable for the same reason. It is reasonable for a reader to conclude at this point that Mary now knows the full truth that previously Will had been keeping from her. The reader may be able to deduce the truth when they learn that the writing on French paper was Jeff Deacon's. This deduction may also lead a reader to guess why the Thodays vanish, especially given the close-knit nature of village life. The correct deduction is that LeGros was Deacon, which means that Mary and Will were not legally married but committing the sin of adultery (albeit unwittingly) and have gone to London to get (re)married away from the gossip of the village.

Lord Peter has already been shown to be an agnostic. Here, one can see that this has its uses: he ignores the sermon about life after death and lets his mind wander, free to make random associations, and this helps him realize where the emeralds are hidden.



Up to this point, all the investigators have been thinking that the emeralds were found by LeGros and taken by the person who tied him up and/or killed him, who is currently presumed to be either James Thoday or Nobby Cranton. The assumption is that the motive for the killing was greed. However, the finding of the emeralds shows that this was not the motive at all: the emeralds had never been taken from their hiding place since Jeff Deacon hid them there.

The fact that the emeralds were indeed hidden by Jeff Deacon makes it clear that Deacon did cheat Cranton and that Cranton has been telling the truth. This makes Cranton a more sympathetic character and prepares the reader (and Lord Peter) to trust Cranton when he later tells his full story: one already knows that he has been truthful and an "honourable thief". It also puts Deacon in a very bad light and makes him less sympathetic. Deacon's bad character also reveals that Mary had indeed been duped and naive.

This chapter also reveals some differences between the Reverend Venables and Mrs. Venables: he thinks nothing but good of everyone, including Mrs. Gates, but Mrs. Venables is more scathing and less tolerant of Mrs. Gates' snobbishness. This also tells us more about Mrs. Gates: she likes the status of her position of housekeeper but does not undertake all the duties of that position of responsibility.

The Venables' discussion of the emeralds stresses the point of materialism. It is obvious that the theft of the emeralds has brought great unhappiness. Not only have people lost their lives for the sake of possessing them, but also the Thorpe family has been ruined financially because of them.

The introduction of Arthur Cobbleigh is deliberately added to distract and confuse the reader; it certainly confuses the investigators, as they had assumed that "LeGros" was one of Deacon's fellow convicts. The conclusions drawn by the investigators at this point are that Deacon wrote the original cipher, and this was taken from him by Cobbleigh, who then killed Deacon. This conclusion is consistent with the need for secrecy when "LeGros" returned to England: he was a wanted man who could have been arrested and hanged for murder. The investigators come up with a number of other possibilities (e.g., that Mary had the original cipher in her keeping).

The series of questions posed by Lord Peter form a type of summary of points that have to be accounted for accurately in order to deduce the truth. These questions include: How did Cobbleigh/LeGros get the cipher in Deacon's writing? Why did Deacon write the cipher on foreign paper? How was Cranton involved? How were the Thodays involved? Who killed Cobbleigh/LeGros? How was Cobbleigh/LeGros killed? Why was he tied up before the death? Why did Will take the money out of the bank and then redeposit it? Who buried the corpse? When did the crime take place? How did the cipher get into the bell-chamber? And finally, who did Potty Peake see talking to Will in the church?

This chapter ends the main section of the novel. All the necessary clues needed to deduce the true backstory have been given, and a reader could, at this point, turn back

to previous chapters and find the necessary information. This structure highlights the "puzzle" aspect of this type of mystery novel.



# The Quick Work

## The Quick Work Summary

Lord Peter announces that he has solved most of the mystery (the only points he is unsure about are who actually killed the corpse and how) and begins to work to prove his theory. Lord Peter, Blundell and Rozier exchange telegrams, revealing that LeGros was Jeff Deacon. The Thodays and Cranton are both detained for questioning. Lord Peter leaves Fenchurch St. Paul, saying goodbye to the Venables and to Hezekiah Lavender.

## The Quick Work Analysis

This is a very short chapter filled with many developments, as the title of the chapter suggests.

Lord Peter's announcement at the start of the chapter has two main functions. The first is a signal to the reader that from this point forward, no new subtle clues will be given but the reader will be presented with the answers. If the reader has been reading the novel as a puzzle-style "whodunnit", he or she has the possibility of going back over the previous sections and working out the answers. The second function is to present a summary of questions that have been raised by the mystery so far.

Lord Peter's manner when he makes this announcement to Blundell is a blend of the comic and the dramatic. Again, Lord Peter has a slightly flippant manner and is rather self-deprecating as well. Again, he does not appear as the super-competent Sherlock Holmes type of detective, but instead humbly says that he has been foolish and blind in not realizing the truth earlier.

Modern readers might not understand the significance of Lord Peter's prediction that the Thodays would return after a fortnight, nor his concern about the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the England of the 1920s-1930s that the novel is set in, there were two possible legal preliminaries prior to a marriage. One alternative was to have the "banns" announced for a fortnight in the church that the wedding was to take place in, while the other was to obtain a marriage license, which could only be issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Readers who are familiar with these practices may conclude that the Thodays are marrying, although the reason why may be obscure. Lord Peter's insistence on speed on the part of the police may also be obscure to modern readers: according to the law of the day, a wife could not be called into court to appear as a witness for the prosecution if her husband was accused of a crime (it is not clear, however, what happened in cases of domestic violence).

The speed at which the next few developments occur is emphasized by the use of telegrams to report them, as the style of telegrams is brief and abrupt, which adds to the atmosphere of speed and urgency. This style is one step removed from the reported





speech used previously to present information in contrast to showing new developments as direct action.

The chapter closes with some moral reflections by Reverend Venables and Hezekiah Lavender, which gives the reader a "breathing space" as well as being highly relevant to the theme of divine justice and holiness. Lord Peter's exchange with the Reverend Venables shows Lord Peter's more vulnerable side: although he likes the fun and excitement of solving a mystery, he often feels sorry for the people who are hurt as a consequence of his actions. Reverend Venables is acting as his spiritual advisor, reminding him that the truth is of utmost importance. It is also hinted that Lord Peter has revealed the full truth to the Reverend Venables, although the reader isn't shown this scene as it would "give away the answers", and this has proved upsetting for both these sympathetic characters. Hezekiah Lavender's exchange with Lord Peter is also thematically important, as well as giving the author a chance to use more bell-ringing jargon for word-play, both in Hezekiah Lavender's little sermon to Lord Peter and in the epitaph. These episodes also keep the bells in the reader's mind, again stressing their importance. Hezekiah's sermon also hints at the correct solution of the one part of the mystery that Lord Peter has not solved.

The reader is told that Lady Wilbraham returned the money paid for the necklace to Hilary Thorpe without any comment. This shows that she is an honest woman, but still makes her appear cold and chilly. It also foreshadows some later developments involving Lord Peter, Hilary Thorpe and Lady Wilbraham.



# Nobby Goes in Slow and Comes out Quick

## Nobby Goes in Slow and Comes out Quick Summary

Parker charges Cranton with the murder of Jeff Deacon. Cranton denies he killed Deacon but tells his story as well as Deacon's. After Deacon had broken out of prison, he hid in the woods and then later killed the soldier Cobbleigh and exchanged clothes with him to take his identity. Deacon had then been sent to the trenches, arriving during an intense battle and a retreat. Terrified, Deacon had run away and been found by Suzanne LeGros. When Deacon had learned that he was officially dead and the farm fell on hard times, he contacted Cranton. Cranton had been given the cipher and had helped Deacon return to England in disguise. Cranton had then come to Fenchurch St. Paul to meet Deacon and had gone into the bell-chamber in an attempt to find the emeralds. In the bell-chamber, he found Deacon tied up and dead. On hearing someone come into the tower, Cranton had hidden on the top of the tower and heard someone taking the body down. He had then run away, terrified.

## Nobby Goes in Slow and Comes out Quick Analysis

This chapter reveals the full backstory about Jeff Deacon and clears up the questions about Arthur Cobbleigh's involvement.

Although the back-story is told in reported speech - being Cranton's version of a letter sent him by Jeff Deacon - it is still very vividly told. This is consistent with what readers have seen earlier of Cranton, as it has already been shown that he has a way with words. Cranton still keeps his slightly reproachful and cheeky attitude towards the police, and only appears resentful about having being charged with the theft of the emeralds rather than being charged with the murder of Deacon. As one has already seen that Cranton is mostly truthful, one is more inclined to believe him when he claims that he did not kill Deacon. Several times, Cranton can be seen following the code of "honour among thieves", which makes him appear as quite a sympathetic and likable character.

The reader is told that Deacon did not intend to kill Cobbleigh but only to stun him; Cranton does not believe this, as Jeff Deacon had already murdered one man. This cold-blooded killing for selfish reasons makes Deacon appear even more unsavory than before. When one reads how Deacon exchanged clothes with the dead soldier, one remembers that all that was found in the den-hole was a skeleton and prison clothes, and no further identification was carried out. The fact that nobody tried to trace Cobbleigh after he disappeared is another reminder of how World War I affected society: so many men had died that if a soldier had disappeared, he would be listed as



"Missing, Presumed Dead", especially as he had gone missing during a massive strafe of the sort when soldiers in the trenches did get literally blown to unrecognizable pieces.

The hints at what some of a soldier's life was like during World War I is also interesting historically. The fact that the LeGros farm had fallen on hard times may also be a reflection of the effects of the Depression during the 1920s.

Cranton's description of his experience in the bell-tower is eerie. His experience and feelings about the bells re-emphasize the thematically important idea that the sacred church bells strike fear into evil-doers and sinners. Readers have seen the pious believers (Jack Godfrey and Hilary Thorpe's) at ease and comfortable around the bells, the good but unbelieving Lord Peter slightly uneasy about the bells; now, readers see the professional thief terrified of the bells. It is suggested by Cranton's words that he was more afraid of the bells themselves than of the dead body and the possibility of arrest.

Cranton's description of how the body looked also raises the final mystery in the mind of the reader: how did Deacon die? Readers learn that the expression on his face was horrifying and Cranton suggests that whatever killed him took some time and Deacon died painfully after suffering.

Lord Peter shows himself to be more empathetic than Parker, as he is able to identify with Cranton's fear of the bells.



# Will Thoday Goes in Quick and Comes out Slow

## Will Thoday Goes in Quick and Comes out Slow Summary

Blundell and Lord Peter question Will and Mary Thoday, who have been trying to remarry. Mary reveals that she had no idea that Deacon had been alive until Lord Peter showed her the cipher. Will tries to say nothing until Blundell suggests that Mary is the guilty one, and this induces him to talk. He denies meeting Deacon in the church, although it is obvious that he knows something. He also denies that James Thoday knew anything about Deacon. Lord Peter fills in his guesses: Will had met Deacon in the church then offered him money to get out of the country quietly as well as imprisoning him in the bell-chamber until he could be removed from the country. The interview ends when Mary faints.

## Will Thoday Goes in Quick and Comes out Slow Analysis

In this chapter, the reader learns quite a lot about Will Thoday's character, and one can see that he is very protective of Mary. He has told her nothing in order to shield her, and he wants to protect her from gossip. He says nothing until Mary is threatened, and he then speaks up in order to protect her. He also appears to be shielding his brother, which makes him appear as a very loyal man. His obvious distress is designed to make him appear sympathetic to the reader, as is his justified anger at the wrongs that Jeff Deacon has inflicted on his family life. The fact that Mary faints when she hears Lord Peter's story about the witnesses shows that this is new knowledge for her and Will has hidden the truth from her. This may be understood as a negative trait of Will's (he has kept secrets from his wife and possibly lied to her to protect her) or as a positive one: he will go to any extreme to protect her and her reputation.

Mary also reveals more about her character, and readers see that she has a sensitive conscience. Although everyone believed that she was a widow when she married Will (and Deacon had taken pains to cover his tracks), she acts as if she had been guilty of adultery or fornication when she learns that Deacon had been alive after all, refusing to take Holy Communion and taking steps to remarry as soon as possible. The relief she shows when Lord Peter addresses her as Mrs. Thoday (rather than Mrs. Deacon) indicates that she wants to be seen as an honest, upright woman, which is how she has been presented throughout the novel. She also shows sympathetic concern when she learns of Suzanne LeGros and her three children. This shows that she is kind-hearted and can think of others, even though she is in considerable distress.



Lord Peter here shows himself to be more empathetic towards other people, in contrast to Blundell. Lord Peter's attitude towards Will and Mary is one of regret and remorse: he knows how much the interview and preventing their remarriage will hurt them, and he seems reluctant to do speak about it. However, he does not let Will Thoday get away with not speaking and confronts Will with what he has learned. Lord Peter is perceptive enough to know that Will is protective of Mary, and it is unlikely that he really believes in his own suggestion that Mary was the guilty one; he seems to be saying this to stimulate Will into speaking up in defense of her.

Concerning the mystery aspect of the plot, this chapter provides the answers to a number of previous questions, specifically what happened to the Reverend Venables' keys (Will, who knew where to find them and was familiar with the vicar's tendency to misplace things, took them while Deacon was hidden in the bell chamber), why Will took the money out then redeposited it (he was going to give Deacon money to get out of the country quietly but redeposited it after Deacon's death), how the bottle got into the bell chamber (Will Thoday provided Deacon with food while he was a prisoner in the bell-chamber) and who tied Jeff Deacon up (Will did, in order to keep him hidden).

However, it is still unclear at this point who killed Deacon, when and how. It is possible that Will Thoday could have killed him before he (Will) came down with influenza, but given his actions with the two hundred pounds, this seems unlikely. Cranton may be guilty, but he denies killing Deacon. James Thoday is another suspect, but Will denies that he knew anything. At this point, James Thoday seems to be the most likely suspect, but he does not seem to have any motive for the killing.

Will Thoday's fear of people in the village talking about them sheds some light on village life and highlights one of the negative points: gossip is rife in this sort of community, and losing one's reputation or being associated with a scandal was something of a disaster. Although many of the characters show that they believe Mary to be innocent of any involvement in the original theft, it is clear that her reputation with the gossips of the village has been tarnished by her association with Deacon.



# The Slow Work

## The Slow Work Summary

Lord Peter and Blundell are perplexed as they wait for James Thoday to return to England. Lady Wilbraham dies and leaves her money to Hilary Thorpe and the emeralds to Lord Peter, who gives the emeralds to Hilary, although she is uncomfortable about her new wealth. Lord Peter returns to the Fenchurch area for the grand opening of the New Wash Cut. James Thoday returns to England but denies all knowledge of Jeff Deacon. His story is compromised by a witness, who shows that James had hired and used a motorbike to give himself an alibi. Parker decides to shut James and Will Thoday in a room with a hidden microphone and learns that although Will tied Deacon in the bell chamber and James took the dead body down and buried it, neither of them killed Deacon.

## The Slow Work Analysis

In this chapter, Lord Peter appears to be rather jaded about the mystery and has lost much of his flippant manner regarding it. It is almost as if the mystery is no longer fun or amusing: the dead body has turned out to be a very unpleasant person, while the person who is most likely to have killed him is likeable. This highlights a tension and a deliberate inconsistency in Lord Peter's character that adds realism to him: although he enjoys the mental stimulation of solving mysteries, he dislikes being responsible for how the consequences of the truth he uncovers affects and hurts other people, innocent or otherwise. (Other novels about Lord Peter show him suffering from a mental breakdown as a result from this tension, and the fictitious biography of Lord Peter "written by his uncle" that is given in some editions also explicitly states that this tension affects him mentally, partly as a result of his wartime experiences that are alluded to in *The Nine Tailors*. He also appears to be frustrated by his inability to work out how Deacon died. His outburst where he expresses a wish that he had been the one to kill Jeff Deacon, followed by the suggestion that the vicar or Hezekiah Lavender killed him seems preposterous and unlikely on first reading, but is later proven to be true.

Lord Peter has regained a lot of his cheerful and good-humored manner when he discusses the emeralds with Hilary Thorpe. Here, he has established himself firmly as her mentor, especially now that he has been appointed the legal trustee of the money she inherited from Lady Wilbraham. This formalized relationship between the two also sets the scene for later, as it gives Lord Peter a good reason for later returning to Fenchurch St Paul.

Hilary Thorpe appears here at her most sympathetic, and her distaste for wealth, especially for the emeralds, shows her to be an unselfish and ungrasping character. Her behaviour is in complete contrast to that of Lady Wilbraham, whose grasping and greedy attitude is symbolized by the way she grasps at the emeralds even while she is



dying. Hilary Thorpe also demonstrates that she does not want to behave like a "proper" traditional heiress, as she has no interest in marrying or in living a life of leisure: she still has her heart set on a career. Her attitude seems, in many ways, to reflect that of Potty Peake, who declares that money is "a great wickedness", as she foresees pressure on herself from her family as a result of her wealth - she may not be free to marry who she pleases later. Lord Peter's experience and example temper her attitude, making her aware that if she owns the money, she is able to put it to a good use, which a more selfish or conventional person might not do. His reminder that Hilary has a few years to wait before she comes of age and can control the money, makes her youthful enthusiasm and impatience apparent.

The opening of the New Wash Cut helps to stress the passing of time while the investigators are waiting for the return of James Thoday, and also serves as foreshadowing of the later flooding by explaining how the drainage system works. This episode also shows a positive aspect of rural village life, where the official opening of a canal becomes a festival. A negative side of rural village life is also shown by the insular and parochial attitude of the sluice keeper, which is an attitude that prevents an integrated and efficient system being created - each area looks out for its own interests without much consideration for how this will affect others. Even the engineer seems to demonstrate an over-conservative attitude in his assumption that because the Thirty-Foot Drain had worked well in the past, it would be able to cope with the results of the new engineering project.

The character of James Thoday is not very well developed in comparison to the more rounded Will. However, one can see that James is quiet and reserved and seems to be less hot-tempered than Will - his response when confronted by evidence that contradicts his story is more polite, in contrast to Will's more explosive denials. When the reader sees him alone with his brother, one also sees that he is brave and unselfish - he is prepared to take the blame for the death of Deacon, even though he believes Will to be the murderer - and face the death penalty so Mary and the children will not suffer.

The use of the hidden microphone allows the author to report the conversation between the two brothers directly without entering the thoughts of either man. This technique allows both the reader and the investigators to obtain new information, but not too much - if the author had "got into the head" of one of the characters, it would be difficult to conceal certain information that the author does not want revealed at this point if that character would realistically be thinking about. The "microphone" technique allows the reader to eavesdrop on an otherwise private conversation that is crucial.

The conclusion of the chapter makes it obvious why both James and Will have been holding information back from Lord Peter and the police: each has been shielding the other. The conclusion also leaves the reader (as well as the investigators) with a puzzle: up to this point, James Thoday has been the most likely suspect, but now readers learn that neither of the Thoday brothers killed Deacon. As Cranton is also unlikely to be the murderer, this raises the level of suspense: who did kill Deacon? The motive for the killing is also left unclear: none of the suspects have a motive, except for Will, but we

are shown that Will intended to get Deacon quietly out of the country instead of killing him.





# The Dodging

## The Dodging Summary

Will tells his story about how he met Jeff Deacon in the church and tied him up in the belfry with food and a warm coat before getting him quietly out of the country with two hundred pounds. Will thought that Jim had managed to get Jeff Deacon away successfully, and was horrified when the body was dug up, believing Jim to have murdered him. Jim tells how Will had sent him to the bell chamber to look after Deacon. When he found Deacon dead, he assumed that Will had killed him, and he took steps to hide the body after ensuring that Deacon couldn't be recognized.

## The Dodging Analysis

This chapter contains an excellent example of irony: each brother believed the other to be guilty of murder and, while disapproving of how Deacon had been killed while tied up, preserved secrecy out of loyalty. The situation borders on being comic, but avoids being funny because of the grim nature of the suspicion.

Both of the Thoday brothers show their good sides quite clearly in this chapter. Will, in particular, reveals that he has a kind-hearted nature: he takes good care of Jeff Deacon while the other man is imprisoned in the bell-chamber, feeding him and lending him a coat so that he neither goes cold or hungry. This treatment of Deacon, who Will has every reason to distrust and dislike, shows a considerate, generous nature. Will continues to show this concern for Deacon even when he (Will) is unwell, and seems to express concern that Deacon is cold and starving in the tower. Will's motives in general throughout this chapter appear to be very generous: he investigates the strange figure walking to the church, thinking that he sees Potty Peake out late in the cold and then apprehends the intruder in the church simply to prevent the church being robbed, and he agrees to help Deacon so that Mary would not be disgraced. His later silence is motivated by his loyalty towards his brother. He is horrified by the idea that Jim had killed Deacon, which indicates that he did not hate Deacon enough to wish him dead.

The character of James Thoday is not developed much further from the previous chapter, although one learns that he is able to overcome his squeamishness when needed (he is able to make himself mutilate the dead body) and that he is quick thinking - he sees the potential of Lady Thorpe's grave as a hiding place for the body.

Thematically, it is interesting to note the reactions of the two brothers to the bells when they enter the bell-chamber. Will Thoday does not report any sense of unease around the bells themselves, and he shows more fear of Deacon than of the bells. This seems to suggest that Will is, fundamentally, a good and upright man who is probably a pious believer - it is definite that he is a regular worshiper at the church and is a bell-ringer, after all. James, however, is more uneasy around the bells, especially when he is



carrying the body downstairs to hide it. His reaction is less extreme than Cranton's and is similar to the reaction of Lord Peter, suggesting that James Thoday is an unbeliever, similar to Lord Peter, as well as being troubled by guilt about what he was doing.

This chapter also raises some interesting ethical questions regarding the actions of Will and James Thoday, and the rights and wrongs of their situation makes for some interesting debate. The novel does not seem to take any clear position on whether their actions were right or wrong, and can be summed up by Parker's comment that as a policeman, he is shocked at how they helped a known murderer escape justice and helped to cover up a crime, but as a human being, he sympathizes with their position.

Lord Peter seems to have regained some of his old flippancy, in contrast to the jaded and tense attitude he shows in the previous few chapters. This is possibly because he now knows that the Thodays, who he sympathizes with, will not be hurt or harmed much.

While this chapter clears up most of the previous questions raised by the mystery, one very big question is left unanswered: who killed Deacon and how. James Thoday's story makes it clear that Deacon did not die of cold, which was raised as a possible cause of death. Again, the violent and drawn-out nature of the death is emphasized.

Parker's comment about how James and Will were lucky to escape being blackmailed is a good summary of Nobby Parker's character: he is respectable and a gentleman in his own way and rather timid and afraid of bloodshed and violence.



# The Waters are Called Out

## The Waters are Called Out Summary

A very wet and difficult year passes in Fenchurch St Paul, and neither the police and Lord Peter can make any progress in discovering who killed Jeff Deacon and how. Lord Peter re-visits Fenchurch St Paul to meet Hilary and her Uncle Henry so they can sort out her future. It is raining heavily during a spring tide and a flood is highly likely, given the state of the sluice-gates at Van Leyden's sluice. Lord Peter meets the Reverend Venables again on his way through the village.

## The Waters are Called Out Analysis

The first few pages of this chapter briefly summarize the passing of time and bring the reader to a year after the start of the novel. Readers are specifically told that Lord Peter has more or less abandoned the mystery, as it is unclear exactly who is responsible for the death. Even the police seem to have left the problem "on the back burner" for the same reason. However, he is brought back into the area (thus reopening the mystery) in quite a natural way by his relationship with Hilary Thorpe.

The first few paragraphs seem to be a criticism by the author of the media's tendency to flit from one "shocking" or sensational story to another, and includes a sample of these lurid headlines. However, it is stated that although media interest in the mystery has died as time goes on, the police and the people affected by the finding of the corpse are still affected by it.

The chapter gives a lot of space to describing the weather, stressing how wet it is. This begins to build towards the flood, making it seem inevitable. Again and again, the atmosphere of dampness is stressed. This, combined with the unanswered question in the mystery, builds tension and keeps the reader interested. The quote at the start of the chapter also suggests that a flood in the area is inevitable: the quote is taken from the Biblical story of Noah. However, this tension is tempered by a few light touches of humour, such as the parody of lurid newspaper headlines and the detail about the pumpkin that is half-cooked by the stoves during the harvest festival.

The appearance of the Reverend Venables is very reminiscent of his first appearance in the novel. As usual, he is considerably blowing his horn as he rushes out in his car on a charitable errand, and is busy organizing peals to be rung. This similarity directs the reader's attention to the first few chapters (those that took place before the finding of the body), subtly suggesting that the events described in them will prove to be significant.



# The Waters are Called Home

## The Waters are Called Home Summary

The sluice-gates begin to give way and workers try to reinforce them with sandbags. The Reverend Venables begins to organize an evacuation to the church and grounds, the only high ground in the area. The people come, bringing animals, food supplies and valuables. The bells ring the alarm and Lord Peter acts as a go-between between the workers and the church. The sluice-gates give way, and Will is drowned trying to rescue one of his fellow-workers from the flood. As the people gather in the church, Lord Peter climbs to the top of the tower while the bells are ringing, suffering extremely from the intense noise as he passes through the bell-chamber.

## The Waters are Called Home Analysis

The brief description of Hilary Thorpe's interactions with Lord Peter, although it is only shown indirectly rather than directly, ties up the loose ends in her story. Readers see her able to follow her dream of going to university and following a career without interference from Uncle Henry, and one can see that her family home is being restored to its former glory, as was the case before the arrival of Jeff Deacon and the theft of the emeralds.

The rest of the chapter is given to the flood, and the pace is fast-paced and tense. This not only exciting for the reader, but also helps to camouflage Lord Peter's experience in the tower, which hints at the solution for the final mystery. Lord Peter's pain and anguish as he passes through the bell-chamber is probably not intended to suggest anything about his character, but relates more to the physical effect of ringing bells on a person in the bell-chamber.

The style blends vivid description with dialogue, and much of the action is conveyed via the dialogue. Some of the description contains Biblical allusions, not only to the story of Noah, but also to the Psalms. Some of the descriptive passages use the same phrasing and terminology as the description of the New Year Peal, suggesting a link between the two.

This chapter reveals a new side to the Reverend Venables, and one learns that although he seems muddle-headed about trivial details such as keys and dinnertime, when it comes to a crisis, he keeps his head and thinks clearly. It is implied that this organization in the face of crisis is a result of the prior thought and prayer the vicar has committed to the possibility of flooding and the necessary steps for evacuation. The Reverend Venables also explicitly states that his very practical wife has helped with details of the the prior organization, which is consistent with the character she has previously displayed and serves to highlight the partnership between them.



Lord Peter gives an excellent example of how he puts his wealth to good use. His wealth means that he owns a very fast car, and he is able to use the speed and power of this vehicle to act as a messenger and also to evacuate the workers. One also sees his generosity and his courage in action here, as he appears to work as hard as all the other people in the area.

This chapter also shows Will Thoday's self-sacrificial death in an attempt to rescue a fellow worker taken by the flood. This makes the final impression left on the reader by Will a favorable one: he takes on a dangerous job to protect others and he dies trying to rescue another person. His final words are, characteristically, concerned with the wellbeing of Mary and his children. In some ways, his death is something of an atonement for his previous actions, and brings a satisfactory closure to his story. It is possible that he could have faced legal action for helping Jeff Deacon, for putting him in a situation where he met his death and in attempting to cover up the death. As the reader (as well as Lord Peter and the police) sympathize with his predicament and motives, this means that Will not be punished in any way. This ties in with the theme of Divine Justice: although it is not suggested that Will's death is a punishment for his actions, he is left to face the judgment and mercy of God rather than to the British legal system. Possibly the situation is presented as too difficult and complicated for human law to judge fairly and this situation is best judged by the highest authority of all. Although his death is avoidable and Mary claims that Will did not want to live, it is unlikely that Will's death is suicide. Instead, Will reacts almost instinctively out of his fundamental goodness and generosity to try rescuing another human being.

Thematically, this chapter is the most important for highlighting the role of the church in village life. The church is the high ground in the area and the people come there to be safe. The way the church building provides a place to be physically stress seems to parallel its spiritual role and moral 'high ground'. This chapter seems to play on the Biblical idea that the people are like sheep while the vicar is like a shepherd, watching over the wellbeing (physical, social and spiritual) of the people, with the church acting like a "sheepfold" or a place of shelter and safety where all are gathered in. The fact that the Parish Register, which seems to be a list of everybody living in the community, is kept in the church and is used as a means of accounting for everybody. The Reverend Venables obviously makes the link between spiritual and social responsibility, shown by how he seems to have spent as much time in prayer and preparation for the emergency as he has on writing sermons and the like, and in the way that he puts on the full priestly regalia to call out the names in the parish register (this regalia also marks him as a person of authority and responsibility, similar to a uniform). It is stated that both churches cooperate in and contribute to the evacuation effort, stressing the fundamental unity between the two, and implying that the older (and more established) Church Of England (Anglican/Episcopalian) is the more significant of the two.

The bells again play an important role in the life of the village, sounding the alarm. Again, this stresses their role in the plot as well as their thematic importance.

The description of how the waters break free from the dike and settle over the landscape ends with the phrase "The Fen had reclaimed her own." This can be taken as

meaning that the landscape has broken free from its artificial constraints and gone back to being a floodplain as the river returns to its natural course. This, in turn, could be symbolic of the way that things can now return to the way they were now that the mystery has (mostly) been solved and that the most responsible person has died, bringing closure. However, it could be also taken to indicate that Will Thoday and his workmate, both local men, have been reclaimed by their native land, reminiscent of the words of the burial service (ashes to ashes; dust to dust).



# The Bells are Rung Down

## The Bells are Rung Down Summary

For a fortnight, the people of the village live in the church and Rectory grounds on a temporary island until the waters recede. Lord Peter reveals that Jeff Deacon was killed by the bells during the New Year peal: the vibrations and/or the decibels killed him.

## The Bells are Rung Down Analysis

This short chapter is divided sharply in two halves, one bringing the account of the flood to its conclusion, and the other providing the solution to the mystery of how Jeff Deacon died.

The first half of the chapter has a cheerful tone to it and is told in summary rather than as direct action. This section gives the details of how the villagers organized themselves during their time on the "island" created by the floods. In many ways, this temporary lifestyle almost condenses normal life, where everybody plays a part in providing food, clothing and entertainment. And, appropriately for the theme, the action takes place within the church and its grounds. During this time, a birth, a wedding and two funerals take place, again highlighting the role of the church in the rhythms of life.

The second half of the chapter is more somber and chilling. The style of writing seems almost ritualistic, beginning with Lord Peter's naming of each of the bells, denouncing them as the murderers of Jeff Deacon. Lord Peter is horrified by the conclusions he has drawn about how Jeff Deacon died, and even though he realized that Jeff Deacon was a bad man, he has enough imagination and experience to realize how Deacon must have suffered before he died and to sympathize with him, even to the point of feeling sorry for him. This says more about Lord Peter's kind nature than about Jeff Deacon.

The Reverend Venables, characteristically, draws a moral lesson from the truth which more or less sums up the theme of divine holiness and justice. It is stressed that the bells are sacred and will repel evil. Here, one sees the most extreme reaction to the bells, where the completely evil Jeff Deacon is trapped in the bell-chamber and is "struck dead and mad all at one go". Deacon's death is also shown to be an example of divine justice: Jeff Deacon would have escaped unpunished, taking Will Thoday's life savings with him, but because Lord Peter "providentially" had an car accident, putting him in the right place at the right time to ensure that the New Year peal was rung, Jeff Deacon was killed.

The novel closes with a repetition of the mottoes on the bells, and the names of all eight, followed by the proverb that "Nine Tailors make a man." The combined bell-mottoes stress the link between the bells and their holiness, and also make a link between the bells and human mortality: the "nine tailors" are rung to indicate the death of a man. This has a rather eerie effect, and this is the final impression left on the reader

that almost overwhelms the closure that has been achieved by the final solution to the mystery.





# Characters

## Lord Peter Wimsey

Lord Peter Death Bredon Wimsey is a wealthy member of the British aristocracy, being the younger brother of the Duke of Denver. He is renowned as an amateur sleuth, and has contacts with the police in France and in London. He is wealthy, and chooses to use his wealth and position to help justice, and has no traces of snobbery. He is able to sympathize with others in all walks of life (a good example of this is when he shows how he can understand the feelings of the thief Cranton inside the belfry at night) and demonstrates a strong understanding of human nature, which, alongside his intelligence, makes him a good detective. He also uses his imaginative powers.

He is an agnostic regarding religious beliefs, but is familiar with the traditions of the Anglican (Episcopalian) church of England, and is also familiar with Bible texts and with other works of literature. This familiarity with church traditions includes a knowledge of the different systems of change-ringing, which initiates his friendship with the Reverend Venables. His lack of true religious belief is shown in the way that he is afraid of the church bells, as this novel, along with many of the characters, expresses the belief that church bells are holy and strike fear into sinners.

Lord Peter is slender and fair-haired with a long nose, but he is slightly below average height. He drives a Daimler motorcar, often rather recklessly. He has a keen appreciation for good food and fine wine, and has a reputation with the French police force as a gourmet.

## Bunter

Bunter is Lord Peter's butler, who assists him with his detective work, often working behind the scenes and as a photographer and in taking fingerprints. He is resourceful and takes the initiative, often remembering small courtesies that Lord Peter has overlooked, such as sending a wreath to the funeral of the mystery man. He is also quick-thinking and manages to invent a story that allows them to obtain the letter sent to "Paul Taylor" on the spot. He also has a strong dress sense, and helps organize the way Lord Peter dresses, even when Lord Peter is wearing a hideous hat out of politeness.

Bunter's speech and behavior are impeccable in public and where the reader sees him in action, and the reader always sees him as courteous, humble and calm. He is, in many ways, the perfect embodiment of an English butler or valet. However, another side of his nature is hinted at in the text. The reader learns that he has a gift of impersonation and a good sense of humor, which he uses behind the scenes with the other domestic servants. Presumably, he can react quite strongly and harshly when upset: Mrs. Venable's maid Emily is so upset by Bunter's reprimands after ruining a piece of evidence that she gives notice. Lord Peter also warns Bunter not to break the



hearts of the vicar's servants, which suggests that Bunter can be a bit of a "ladies' man" behind the scenes at times.

## Reverend Theobald Venables

The Reverend Theobald Venables is the vicar (rector or pastor) of Fenchurch St Paul. He is an idealized portrait of an Anglican (Episcopalian) minister, whose most marked characteristic is concern for the members of his parish. He is very enthusiastic about change-ringing, and has written a small book on the topic. Although he is very fond of his church building and the ceremonial traditions of the Anglican church, he shows no animosity to other denominations, working with the local Methodists without any trace of rivalry during the flood that threatens the area. He is goodnatured and hospitable, and shows great patience with the bungling attempts of Wally Pratt, his youngest ringer. He also does not like to think ill of any of his parishioners and is genuinely shocked at the idea that Will Thoday may be a murderer.

The Reverend Theobald Venables is short sighted and can be slightly disorganized. One of his notable traits is his tendency to misplace items and forget where he has put them, a trait which allows Will Thoday to be able to take his key to the bell-chamber without comment. His short-sightedness also contributes to the cipher being solved, as he thinks Lord Peter is "pricking out a peal" rather than sorting out the cipher letters, which give Lord Peter the inspiration that leads to the correct solution. He also has a tendency to lose track of the time, especially when his church building or bell-ringing are concerned.

In spite of the Reverend's apparent absent-mindedness, he shows a great deal of practicality and common sense during a crisis, and the reader is specifically told that he had made plans (with a great amount of help from his more practical wife) for coping with the flood well before time. He also has enough practical common sense to send for the police after the body is discovered.

The Reverend Theobald Venables is described as elderly. He is married and has two grown-up daughters who do not appear in the plot.

## Mrs. Agnes Venables

Mrs. Venables is the wife of the Reverend Venables. She is hospitable, practical and organized, showing a lot of patience with the absent-mindedness and the almost continual tardiness of her husband. When her husband misplaces items, she is the most likely person to find the missing item. The reader is also told that she is the more practical of the couple and took care of much of the practical details of the plans to cope with the floods. She is the one who is most likely to take the initiative to make practical changes, such as arranging for the churchyard to be properly drained.



Mrs. Venables seems to show something of a maternal streak towards Lord Peter, allowing him to sleep late when he is tired and providing him with a hat to protect his head and supplying him with drinks while he is at work.

Mrs. Venables is the first person to raise the possibility that the dead man came from France and had a wife, which she concludes from her inspection of the dead man's underclothes. Her deductions are later proved to be correct.

## Jeff Deacon

Jeff Deacon is the true identity of the mysterious corpse found in the graveyard. Jeff Deacon was formerly the butler to the Thorpe family at the Red House. He is unscrupulous and completely lacking in morals and seems to be totally lacking a conscience. First, he abuses his position of trust to arrange a burglary of the house where he works. Next, he cheats his partner in crime, hiding the emeralds from Cranton and attempting to put the blame entirely on him. He murders two men when he breaks out from prison, and he never reveals the truth about his past to his French wife Suzanne, whom he marries illegally, as he never divorced Mary. He also attempts to blackmail Will Thoday when Will encounters him in the church attempting to recover the hidden emeralds, as Will married Mary, believing her to be a widow. His bigamy is unsurprising - Blundell describes him as being "always after a skirt".

Jeff Deacon is highly intelligent, demonstrated by his ability to compose the cipher and pick up a particularly difficult method of change-ringing very quickly. He also invents a convincing story to cover up his identity and history when the French authorities investigate him after the war.

He has a distinctive scar on one of his hands, which prompts James Thoday to cut his hands off before burying him.

Jeff Deacon goes by several aliases. He first takes the identity of Arthur Cobbleigh, whom he murders and exchanges clothes with after breaking prison, leading people to believe him dead when a skeleton is discovered wearing prison clothes in the woods near the jail. Next, he takes the name Jean LeGros (literally Big John) in France, although it is his wife Suzanne who gives him the name Jean. Lastly, he takes the alias of Paul Taylor (named after the bell) when he returns to England to recover the emeralds.

Jeff Deacon is by far the most unsympathetic character in the novel and is, in many ways, the real villain of the plot.

## Nobby Cranton

Nobby Cranton is a jewel thief who once was Jeff Deacon's accomplice in the attempted robbery of the Wilbraham emeralds. Cranton seems to be incorrigible - he has served time in jail several times for burglary but continually re-offends. He is impertinent to the



police when questioned, and seems very adept at criminal activity - he arranges for a false passport for Deacon and helps him to enter the country under a false identity.

However, Cranton has his sympathetic side. His attitude toward the police somewhat comic, but he does not appear to be particularly resentful toward them - his attitude toward his jail terms seems to be rather resigned and philosophical. He describes himself as a "gentleman", and this description is echoed by Lord Peter. He is slightly timid (Lord Peter says that he has "the heart of a rabbit" and is afraid of bloodshed) and rather imaginative, which comes out most strongly in his story to Lord Peter and the police when he fills in the missing portion of Jeff Deacon's history and describes the night he (Cranton) spent in the belfry. He is also made sympathetic to the reader when it is proven that he was wrongfully sent to prison for the theft of the emeralds, even though he was cheated by his accomplice.

Cranton also shows a forgiving nature - he is willing to work with Deacon a second time, even though Deacon cheated him once before. However, Cranton is wise enough to request some sort of security, which comes in the form of the cipher that he later drops accidentally in the belfry. He also has some trace of honor in him, as he could have blackmailed James Thoday after witnessing the secret burial but did not.

When he stays with the Wilderspains in order to investigate the church secretly (and possibly to meet up again with Jeff Deacon), he takes the alias Steven Driver. He grows a beard in order to disguise himself and to help Deacon obtain the false passport. Ordinarily, he is clean shaven. Physically, he is rather slightly built and weak, and when the reader sees him, he is in hospital recovering from pneumonia. It is also possible that he has a heart condition.

## Will Thoday

Will Thoday is an agricultural laborer whose most dominant trait is his devotion and protection of his wife Mary. Will Thoday is the one who ties Jeff Deacon up in the bell chamber, which inadvertently brings about Deacon's death. His motivation for assisting Jeff Deacon even though Deacon was a known criminal was to protect his wife's reputation and to cover up the fact that he was not legally married to Mary - her husband was still alive, even though everyone believed him to be dead and that she was a young widow when he married her. He also takes great pains to hide the truth from Mary and only unwillingly tells her after Lord Peter shows her the cipher letter and she realizes her first husband had been alive after her remarriage. He only confesses to the police after they suggest that Mary may be the guilty party rather than him - he will do anything to protect her and her reputation, especially as she has already had a brush with the law.

Will Thoday knows that he did not kill Deacon, and is genuinely shocked when the body is discovered, believing his brother to be the murderer. However, he shows great loyalty towards his brother and refuses to accuse him of the crime. When Will Thoday realizes that James did not kill Deacon, he guesses how Deacon died and feels responsible for



the death. It is hinted that this guilty knowledge haunts him and makes him lose the will to live.

Will dies near the end of the book in an attempt to rescue a co-worker from the floodwaters, leaving the reader with a good impression of this character - he dies nobly, attempting to help another person after working hard to protect the district from the flood. It is possible that his self-sacrificial death is intended to atone for his role in the death of Deacon, although it is not suicide.

The only physical description the reader has of Will Thoday is that he is a very tall man.

The sympathetic portrayal of Will Thoday, in combination with the completely unsympathetic and despicable character of Jeff Deacon, help the reader to consider that Will is not really guilty of any crime, even though he assists a known felon and later covers up Deacon's death, and is, technically, guilty of the death. Readers tend to see him as being innocent and as a "good" character, or at least mostly innocent.

## **Potty Peake**

Orris "Potty" Peake is a mentally handicapped man living in the village. He has the job of pumping the bellows organ in the church and feeding pigs. He has a complex about ropes and hanging, dating to the time that he found his mother's body after she committed suicide by hanging herself. Potty Peake is pious in his way, and his simple-minded actions make him a witness to part of what happened in the church: he was feeling grateful for a good dinner, so he went to the church at night to give thanks, and he was sitting behind the tomb of Abbot Thomas and saw Will Thoday talking to the bearded stranger, talking about money and getting a rope from the cope-chest.

The people of the village show considerable concern for Potty Peake, making allowances for him and providing him with meaningful work. Inspector Blundell, for example, is unwilling to suspect let alone charge him with the murder, even though it there is a slight possibility that he could have - Inspector Blundell does not want Potty Peake to be committed to a mental institution and knows him to be a harmless member of the community.

## **Suzanne LeGros**

Suzanne LeGros is a French peasant woman who combines practical common sense with a strong romantic and emotional streak. She finds Jeff Deacon, at this time under the alias of Arthur Cobbleigh, wounded after deserting from the war, and nurses him back to health, giving him a new identity and a new life in France. She is hardworking, as proven by her ability to manage the farm alone without her husband and her careful mending of the underclothes. She is also very stubborn, giving a false story about her husband's whereabouts.



This character is the one who seems to be shown as one of the victims of Jeff Deacon's duplicity. Deacon does not tell her the truth about himself in spite of being married to her for over ten years: he does not even tell her his real name, let alone that he is a thief and a murderer. He enters into a bigamist marriage with her, knowing full well that he has a wife still living (whom he has not divorced). He lies to her about why he would be in danger if he returned to England - she genuinely believes that he is in danger of being shot for deserting the army. Also, she is left widowed with three children with a failing farm. The reader is not told what happens to her afterward.

## Inspector Blundell

Inspector Blundell is the policeman responsible for Fenchurch St Paul and the surrounding areas. He works hard alongside Lord Peter to solve the case, and the case is officially his responsibility to solve. He plays a vital role in filling in the back story about the jewel theft and the beginning of Deacon's story. His main contribution to the solution of the mystery is to work out the time of the death and to question the locals.

Blundell is married and has two daughters, who are presumably in their teens or early twenties (they are single and living at home, but they are employed). He shows considerable tact when questioning the snobbish Mrs. Gates and stretches the truth slightly to win her sympathy. He also has a sense of humor and sees the funny side of Mrs. Gates' conversation. He also is considerate towards Potty Peake, and does not want him to end up in a mental institution or even suspect him of the crime.

Blundell does a lot of the "legwork" involved in solving the crime. He takes care of the routine, practical and official details, while the imaginative and brilliant deductions are done by Lord Peter, the amateur/private detective. His character is not rounded out fully, and he seems to have a purely practical function to help the plot along and provide essential background information.

## Hezekiah Lavender

Hezekiah Lavender is an elderly and very pious man who is responsible for ringing Tailor Paul, and has done so for the past sixty years (and intends to continue for another twenty years if he lives that long). He is the retired sexton of the parish and seems to be the leader of the bell-ringers. He is rather crusty and old-fashioned, and tends to quote scripture at every possible opportunity - he even preaches to Lord Peter. He shows a slight lack of patience with the bungling of Wally Pratt.

Physically, Hezekiah Lavender is described as a gnarled old gnome with no teeth and a long beard. He seems to be a tough old gentleman who is proud of his great age and his "relationship" with the bell. He seems to share the common superstition/belief that church bells are aware of evil and can strike fear into evildoers.



## Harry Gotobed

Harry Gotobed is the sexton of the parish, responsible for caring for the grounds of the church and the graveyards. He also acts as the gravedigger and undertaker for the parish and seems to take pride in this work. He is the one to discover the body, which he does when he is reopening the grave of Lady Thorpe in preparation for her husband's burial. He seems to be rather unsqueamish and practical when they find the body, philosophically saying that even if it is unpleasant to dig the earth away from the corpse (which they do to prevent disturbing the evidence for the police), they can wash their hands afterwards. It is reasonable to assume that his familiarity with handling the dead has given him this cold-bloodedness.

Harry Gotobed is one of the ringers, and he is responsible for ringing Jericho, the fourth bell in the ring.

The appropriateness of his name is alluded to by the Reverend Venables. "Go to bed" is appropriate for a gravedigger and undertaker, who lays people to rest in the grave - the final bed and the longest sleep.

## James Thoday

James Thoday is the brother of Will who helps him hide Deacon's presence. He is very loyal towards his brother and does not turn him in to the police, even though he believes Will to have murdered Deacon. He is the one who mutilated the corpse and buried it secretly in order to cover up the crime. He even offers to take the blame for the murder in Will's place, as he is unmarried and if he is hanged for murder, Mary would still be provided for. However, he is a good man and is shocked by the idea that his brother tied up Deacon before killing him, which leads to a cooling of the previously warm and close relationship between him and his brother.

James Thoday is a sailor working on a merchant ship. He visits his brother when he is on shore leave, and the Thoday's parrot was a gift from him brought from overseas.

## Mary Thoday

Mary was once the wife of Jeff Deacon and is now the wife of Will Thoday. She was once accused of playing a role in the theft of the emeralds, but was found innocent. However, her brush with the law has tarnished her local reputation. She is a law-abiding woman with a strong conscience - she insists that Will remarry her when she discovers that her marriage to him was invalid, as Deacon had been alive and still her legal husband when she married Will. Discovering that she had, technically speaking, committed bigamy and adultery horrifies her, and she is very grateful when Lord Peter addresses her as "Mrs. Thoday" even when it is known that, at that point, she is not legally married to Will.



Mary is shown as one of Jeff Deacon's victims, as Deacon's actions make her unwittingly do something that she believes to be a sin and a crime (bigamy, or else adultery). The reader feels a lot of pity for her, especially when she is left widowed after Will's death.

## Hilary Thorpe

Hilary Thorpe is an intelligent young woman who the daughter of Sir Charles, the local squire. While she is upset when both her parents die of influenza, leaving her orphaned at fifteen, she carries on with her life. She has dreams of being an author or a poet after attending university (this is slightly radical, as universities had only recently started allowing women to graduate with degrees during the time the novel takes place), and Lord Peter encourages her in her ambitions. Although she is a member of the aristocracy, she is not snobbish or class-conscious, and is unhappy when she discovers that she is named as not only her father's heir but also Mrs. Wilbraham's. She is afraid that her uncle might make her marry a wealthy man, but Lord Peter reassures her and acts as her mentor.

Hilary plays a role in the plot by sending the cipher to Lord Peter after she finds it in the belfry, and she also supplies more information to Lord Peter about the details of the funeral.

She is shown as being unafraid of the bells. Taken in conjunction with the local belief that sinners and evildoers are afraid of the bells, this suggests that she is a true believer and pious. The reader can see some of her piety in action when she brings flowers to the church to decorate it and when she prays that her father will not die.

It is possible that Dorothy Sayers has put a little of herself into this character, as Ms. Sayers grew up in the Fens of England, went to a university and had a successful career as an author and poet. Ms. Sayers was also a devout member of the Anglican church, as is Hilary Thorpe.

## Lady Wilbraham

Lady Wilbraham is an eccentric and wealthy spinster who owns the emeralds that are stolen by Jeff Deacon. She is shown as being rather grasping and greedy, as she takes money from Sir Henry Thorpe in recompense for the loss of the emeralds, even though Sir Henry was not financially well off and was not responsible for the theft. She leaves her money to Sir Henry, however, on the grounds that he is the most honest man she knows, and she also appreciates Lord Peter's unselfish helpfulness in finding the emerald and returning them to her.





## Mrs. Gates

Mrs. Gates is the housekeeper at the Red House. She is snobbish and class-conscious, but this behavior allows the police to work out when the body was put into the grave - Mrs. Gates noticed when her simple and "appropriate" wreath for Lady Thorpe's grave was moved aside, contrary to her very strict instructions.

Her snobbishness give the reader a disagreeable impression of her, but she can also be seen as a comic character; Inspector Blundell certainly can see the comic side of her snobbery. However, Mrs. Venables disapproves of her behavior, stating that her snobbery leads her to neglect some of her duties as the head of the Red House servants.

## Jack Godfrey

Jack Godfrey is the vergers (caretaker) of the church building and the bells, and is one of the ringers. He owns one of the sets of the keys to the bell chamber. He seems to be the most superstitious regarding the bells, as he believes Batty Thomas, the bell he rings, to be an unlucky bell, as the bell has caused the deaths of two people in the past.

## Ezra Wilderspin

Ezra Wilderspin is the local blacksmith who also acts a motor mechanic. He employs "Steven Driver" and gives evidence about him at the inquest. He is one of the bell-ringer and he pulls Gaude, the smallest bell in the ring. As he is a very large, strong man, his responsibility for the smallest bell is ironic, which is pointed out by the Reverend Venables.

## Monsieur Aristide Rozier

Monsieur Rozier is a French police commissioner who helps trace Suzanne LeGros and fills in this part of the history of the corpse. He has always had some suspicions about "Jean LeGros" and his origins. He makes friends readily with Lord Peter and shares Lord Peter's enthusiasm for good food and wine.

The name "Rozier" seems to be derived from "rozzer," which was once British slang for a policeman.

## Wally Pratt

Wally Pratt is the youngest and least experienced of the bell ringers. He is a mostly comic character who is notable for his bungling - notice the brief mention of him during the inquest where he muddles his left and right hands.



## Sir Henry Thorpe

Sir Henry is the father of Hilary Thorpe, and the body is discovered after his death when his late wife's grave is opened up for his burial. He is an honest man - he recompenses Lady Wilbraham for the loss of the emeralds - and he is unconventional enough to allow his daughter to go to university and earn her own living, which was rather radical for young aristocratic women in the 1920s. He encourages his daughter in her career plans and regrets that he will be unable to leave her much money when she dies. Hilary states that he would have got on very well with Lord Peter.

## Chief Inspector Parker

Chief Inspector Parker is a member of the CID who works with Lord Peter to trace and interview various suspects. He is familiar with criminals and their ways, and his interaction with Nobby Cranton is not particularly antagonistic - in fact, Parker seems remarkably tolerant of Nobby's impertinence. However, he does not quite have the sympathetic and empathetic imagination of Lord Peter Wimsey.

Although it is not made apparent in this novel, Parker appears in many of the Lord Peter Wimsey mystery novels, and he is Lord Peter's best friend as well as being married to Lord Peter's sister.

## Mr. and Mrs. Ashton

An elderly couple living near Will and Mary Thoday. They are kindly and hospitable. They represent the good aspects of the old ways of village life where people made their own bacon and wine and where neighbors helped each other as a matter of course.



# Objects/Places

## Fenchurch St. Paul

This is both the name of the church and the village where most of the action of the story is set. It contains a main street, two public houses, an Anglican (Episcopalian) church, a Methodist church and a school. The most notable places in the village are the Red House, which belongs to the aristocratic Thorpe family, and the church, which stands with a vicarage (rectory) and the cemetery on a small hill. It is quite close to the massive Thirty-Foot Drain, which drains much of the surrounding farmland, which has been reclaimed from the former swamps. Several other towns are situated nearby, the most important of which are Leamholt and Walbeach.

## St. Paul's church

This church was originally an abbey in the Middle Ages, once governed by Abbot Thomas, who ordered the founding of the great bell Batty Thomas and whose tomb still stands in the church. The church is quite large and has a massive bell-tower 128 feet high. The main part of the church once had galleries forming a type of mezzanine floor, but these were removed prior to the main action of the plot. The roof of the church is very notable for the carved and gilded angels that decorate it.

The bell-tower at the western end of the church has two main parts: the ringing chamber where the ropes hang down, and the bell-chamber where the bells themselves hang, although an empty room lies between the two. The bell-chamber and the top of the tower can be accessed by a ladder and a locked trapdoor, for which only the Reverend Venables and Jack Godfrey have the keys.

The church is surrounded by the cemetery or churchyard and it stands on top of a twelve-foot hill with the vicarage. Its elevation means that in times of flood, the church and the vicarage are the only places in the area that are safe from flooding.

## Walbeach

Walbeach is one of the principal towns in the Fen area. It was once a seaside town, but over the centuries, the shoreline has extended. Walbeach is larger than Fenchurch St. Paul and contains a number of shops and post offices.

## The Wilbraham Emeralds

This is a priceless necklace that was once stolen by the butler Jeff Deacon. After the theft, the jewels were never seen again, even though the thieves were caught. Sir Henry recompensed Lady Wilbraham for the loss of the emeralds, which ruined him financially.



A cipher message leads to the emeralds being rediscovered, and they are returned to Lady Wilbraham. Ultimately, Lady Wilbraham leaves them in her will to Hilary Thorpe.

The jewels were originally hidden by Lady Wilbraham in a chamber-pot or bedroom commode, which her maid discovers and laughs about with Mary. Mary tells Jeff Deacon, her husband at the time, who arranges to steal them with the help of Cranton. However, instead of passing them to his accomplice, Deacon only gives Cranton the jewel case and hides the emeralds in the church. He returns years later, when he learns that he is presumed dead, to attempt to recover the emeralds, which is what he was doing when discovered by Will Thoday.

## Batty Thomas

Batty Thomas is one of the oldest bells in the church, named after the stern old abbot who once governed the medieval monastery. Batty Thomas is supposed to be an unlucky bell, similar to the cantankerous old abbot who ordered it made. Batty Thomas had killed two other men in the past. Jack Godfrey is responsible for ringing this bell, and the onomatopoeic representation of the bell's note is "bom".

## Tailor Paul

This is the biggest and deepest bell in the church, rung by Hezekiah Lavender. It is rung to announce every death in the parish, first an appropriate number of strokes to indicate the gender of the deceased (six for a woman; nine for a man), followed by one stroke for every year that the deceased had lived. The onomatopoeic representation of its note is "bo".

## The Church Bells

These are made of brass and hang in the bell-chamber of the church. There are eight of them, named Gaude, Sabaoth, John, Jericho, Jubilee, Dimity, Batty Thomas and Tailor Paul. They have inscriptions on them with various mottoes and information. The bells are vital to community life, as they are used to announce births, deaths and marriages, and to ring the alarm when danger threatens the village, as well as calling people to worship at the church. Onomatopoeically, the notes of the different bells (in order from highest (Gaude) to deepest (Tailor Paul), they sound "tin, tan, din, dan, bim, bam, bom, bo".

The bells are considered to be holy, and because they are holy, they can sense evil. A common belief is that wrongdoers and sinners are afraid of the bells, and the various characters in the novel react appropriately to the bell. This belief, alongside the theme of divine justice, make the role of the bells in the mystery very important: the bells are what kill the villain who has literally got away with murder, theft, bigamy and deception until that point.



## The Cipher

This is picked up by Hilary Thorpe in the bell-chamber. While on the surface it appears to be an obscure passage in the style of Sheridan LeFanu's supernatural thrillers, it uses the permutations and combinations of bell-ringing to give a message that leads to the hiding place of the emeralds. To decrypt the cipher, the letters should be set out in columns of eight, and the letter that represents the place in the pattern that Tailor Paul would ring in gives the correct letters. The idea of using a bell-ringing pattern for a cipher originally is proposed by the Reverend Venables, who mistakes Lord Peter's columns of letters for a peal. The code was originally written by Jeff Deacon when he was living in France, and the odd French paper attracts Hilary Thorpe's attention to it.

When decrypted, the cipher gives the reader three verses from the psalms. These psalms suggest that the reader should look between the carved wooden cherubim in the south aisle of the church. This place is located where Jeff Deacon and the other Red House servants used to sit before the galleries in the church were taken down.

## The Drains and Canals

These are an intricate system designed to drain the farmland in the fens, without which the countryside would be swamp. A number of governing bodies oversee different parts of the drainage system, which means that the antiquated sluices on the Thirty-Foot Drain have been neglected, as each governing body thinks that the sluice-gates are the responsibility of the other governing body. During the action of this novel, a new canal has been made that can carry a lot of extra water during times of flooding (in theory), but also can carry a lot of silt downstream and cause blockages. Creating a safe and integrated drainage system is hampered by a number of factors, ranging from parochial rivalry to an attempt to copy Dutch methods without taking local conditions into account.

The theoretical value of the New Wash Cut is put to the test during a high spring tide following heavy rainfall and a thaw, but the sluice-gates give out and a flood threatens the Fenchurch villages, including Fenchurch St. Paul, forcing all villagers to evacuate to the higher ground of the church. Will Thoday dies in this flood attempting to rescue a fellow worker in the civil defense team attempting to strengthen the sluice.

## The Fens

This is a low-lying part of England in Lincolnshire that is criss-crossed by dikes, drains and canals. Its roads are straight and tend to meet at right angles - or turn very sharply. The only higher grounds in the area are the hillocks where the churches and their surrounding land stand. Without the drainage system, most of the countryside would be swamp, and the area is at a very high risk of flooding. The principal towns in the area are Walbeach and Leamholt, and smaller villages in the area include Fenchurch St. Paul, Fenchurch St. Peter and Fenchurch St. Stephen.



## The Parrot

This belongs to Will and Mary Thoday, and was a gift from James Thoday, acquired on his travels as a sailor. It is a noisy bird that screams loudly and possibly swears. It also learns some phrases uttered by Will in his illness when he could not get to the bell-chamber during the New Year peal when Deacon was tied up in the bell-chamber: "Must go to church, must go to church! The bells! The bells! Don't tell Mary." This gives Lord Peter a clue as to how Deacon died.

## Lady Thorpe's Grave

This lies in the northeast side of the church. Lady Thorpe was buried here but it had to be reopened within a few months of her burial when her husband also succumbs to influenza. When it is reopened, the mysterious body of a man is found inside it by Harry Gotobed and his son.

## The Corpse

This is found in Lady Thorpe's grave. It has been mutilated to prevent it being recognized by beating the face in and cutting off the hands. It is of a bearded man dressed in a dark suit of English make, although the underclothes are French and very worn. The pockets contain a French coin and an unusual hook-like piece of wire.

## The Red House

This is where Jeff Deacon once worked and is owned by the Thorpe family. It is the stately home of the district and has surrounding farmland belonging to it. As it is a stately home, many servants work there, including Mrs. Gates the housekeeper and Johnson the gardener.

## The Villagers

These are the people who live in Fenchurch St Paul. They are a very close-knit community, with many family ties between them and where gossip is rife. The villagers take a keen interest in any unusual happening in the community and enjoy the regular festivals that come as part of church life, such as Harvest Festival and the New Year service. The church, like the two pubs, seem to be central to the lives of the villagers.

## Sluice-Gates

These are supposed to prevent the water coming down the Thirty-Foot Drain from flooding the area, but they are in a very bad state of repair, as none of the drainage

authorities claims responsibility for keeping them in good order. Eventually, they break under pressure causing a massive flood.



# Themes

## Divine Justice and Holiness

Dorothy Sayers was a devout Christian and theologian, and one of the themes of this novel is based in her beliefs: the idea of holiness and righteousness.

The most obvious way that the theme of righteousness is expressed in this novel is that a wrongdoer is punished for his crimes that he would otherwise have "got away with". Jeff Deacon was a thief, a cheat, a bigamist, a blackmailer and a murderer, and he would have been able to profit by all his crimes - returning with either the emeralds or Will's life savings to France - safely (Will was not in a position to hand him over to justice), but a series of accidents and coincidences lead to Jeff Deacon facing death, which would have been the legal punishment for his crimes (murder carried the death penalty in England during the time the novel was set).

The accidents/coincidences that lead to Deacon's death are that Will Thoday is unable to get Deacon out of the bell-chamber because he (Will) was unwell, and Lord Peter has a car accident that strands him in Fenchurch St. Paul, and because he is a ringer, the New Year peal is able to take place after all.

The Reverend Venables explicitly states that the presence of Lord Peter is due to "Providence" or God at work. The reader is therefore led to conclude that within this novel, divine justice wanted to ensure that the evildoer Jeff Deacon was punished. Other elements in the plot also seem to show Providence at work to help solve the mystery and set all to rights. Hilary Thorpe comes to the church to bring flowers for the Easter celebration and finds the cipher that leads to the emeralds. Potty Peake goes to the church to give thanks for his meal in what he believes to be the most appropriate place and sees Will Thoday with a stranger talking about money. The Reverend Venable's short-sightedness causes him to mistake the cipher for a peal, leading to the cipher being solved.

It is appropriate that Deacon is killed by the bells, as this is linked to the thematic idea of holiness and that holiness drives out evil. In the New Year sermon and in the inscriptions on the bells and on the ringing chamber, it is emphasized that the bells are consecrated (sacred or holy) and are designed for the purpose of worship and giving glory to God. Reference is frequently made to the idea that church bells (or the sound of church bells) strikes fear into evildoers and sinners, which ties in with this idea. The peal that killed Deacon was partly done for fun, but was also done in order to praise God, as instructed in the psalm read out in that service. When the peal is rung, the evildoer who brought chaos and disruption is killed.

It is unclear whether the death of Will Thoday is also an example of divine justice. It is certainly the case that Will was not completely innocent (he did try to help a known criminal and accidentally brought about his death, and he was not completely honest





with his wife). However, Will meets his death trying to rescue a fellow-worker from the flood, and it is implied that his death is not so much a punishment but an atonement. Possibly, because Will might be found guilty by a court of law and hanged, being killed by the flood means that he is left to get justice - and mercy - from the ultimate authority.

## The role of the church in society

One of the most important themes of this novel is the role that the church plays (or should play) in society. This is stressed by the way that the church physically looms over the setting, and the way that the whole mystery is connected to the church itself.

The reader can see clearly how village life is dominated by the church not only physically, but also socially. This domination is not oppressive; the church acts as a community hub, alongside the pubs. The church provides a place to socialize and church events provide a major form of entertainment for the villagers: it is the site for festivals, funerals, weddings and various meetings (for example, the Clothing Club is mentioned in passing). The church bells also act as a sort of "bush telegraph", especially the ringing of the passing bell, Tailor Paul. The passing bell uses a sort of code that allows the hearers - which includes most of the village, as the sound of the bell carries considerably - to know who has died recently: the bell indicates the gender and the age of the deceased. The bells are also used as alarms during times of crisis: the reader learns that the bells were used to ring the air-raid alarm during World War I, and one can see that the bells are used to notify the district of a natural disaster (the flood).

Readers are also given a portrait of an ideal vicar in the Anglican (Episcopalian) church, which shows the way the church - as an organization, rather than a building - works in society. Reverend Venables acts as a social worker as well as a spiritual guide and teacher, he visits sick people to offer practical help as well as emotional support, he freely offers his car and his hospitality to strangers and he lends money generously to people. Mrs. Venables is shown as being an equal partner in this work, with her practicality acting as a balance to his absent-mindedness. During times of crisis, the vicar also acts as a civil defense manager, organizing the evacuation of the village and ensuring that everyone is accounted for (the parish register is a record of all the people living in the area and is kept, appropriately, at the church; this document also records dates of births, deaths and marriages).

This role played by the vicar seems to be derived from the Biblical metaphor of the people as sheep and the vicar as a shepherd. This metaphor seems to be extended to the church building itself, which acts as a physical "sheepfold". This imagery is shown most clearly when the vicar reads out the parish register to ensure that everyone is safe in the church. It is significant that Reverend Venables puts on the ritual clothing of a priest to do this: this emphasizes that the true role of a priest or pastor is to care for the people of his parish.



The Anglican church is not the only place of worship in the village, and some of the villagers attend the "chapel" or Methodist church. However, no antagonism is seen between the two denominations, and both churches work together during the flood peaceably and harmoniously for the good of all. Sometimes, a small trace of inter-denominational rivalry can be seen, most notably in the conflict between Mrs. Coppins and Mrs. Gates. However, this antagonism seems more personal than otherwise.

## **Greed is destructive**

Greed and materialism are shown as being destructive forces. Hilary Thorpe sums up the theme when she expresses her distaste for the emeralds, saying that they have led to the death of three men (Deacon, her father and grandfather) and have brought financial ruin on her family. Certainly, greed and materialism - what used to be called covetousness - is the main motive for the crimes. It is a desire for wealth that causes Deacon to steal the emeralds and to cheat Cranton, his accomplice.

Greed is contrasted with generosity, and it is demonstrated that wealth and greed do not necessarily go together. Lord Peter is an example of someone who is wealthy but who is generous with his wealth. He specifically points out to Hilary when she learns that she is a wealthy heiress that money can be used for the benefit of others rather than being spent selfishly on one's self. In this way, he is set in contrast with Lady Wilbraham, who is both wealthy and grasping - Joe Hinkins states that a "real lady" would not have accepted the money from Sir Henry. Mrs. Gates also appears to be a more grasping character - notice Mrs. Coppins's comment about how Mrs. Gates's wreath seemed to indicate stinginess rather than social propriety - although she is a more comic figure.

Oddly, the thief Cranton does not appear to be greedy, even though he is a criminal. It is almost as if he views theft as a profession or a job. He certainly demonstrates a generous nature when he agrees to work with Deacon a second time, even though Deacon has cheated him once before.

Many of the more religious-minded characters seem to show this lack of greed and materialism, and they are, on the whole, more positive characters. Characters who illustrate this include the Reverend Venables, who lends money freely and is always ready to give to others, and Potty Peake, who believes that money leads to wickedness and is grateful to have food and a job. One moral lesson that can be drawn from the character of Potty Peake may be that it is better to be mentally handicapped and free from greed than to be highly intelligent (as was Jeff Deacon) and greedy; this is consistent with the Biblical outlook held by the author.

## **Village life and social change**

This novel gives a portrait of life in a rural village in England during a time of social upheaval and change.



Prior to the changes that affect the village, rural life was orderly and predictable. People looked up to the local squire at the Red House (the Thorpe family) as an authority figure, in much the same way as they looked to the local policeman and the vicar as authority figures. Entertainment was mostly related to the church and its seasons, as well as the rhythms of agricultural life, with market days being very important. The community was very tightly knit, with everybody knowing everyone else, and most people being connected via family ties.

However, this novel does not show village life as being Utopian. Gossip is rife and reputations could be lost very easily with the slightest hint of scandal. The older villagers show suspicion of outsiders - note the otherwise pious and righteous Hezekiah Lavender expressing his distaste for Jeff Deacon on the grounds that he was a Londoner rather than a local, as well as being a thief. The close family ties also can lead to problems of inbreeding, and it is specifically stated that Potty Peake's mental handicap is a result of inbreeding. The parochial spirit also leads to problems of a larger nature - the attitude of "it's their water and they can deal with it" leads to the system of drains, canals, locks and dikes being rather patchy rather than integrated, and this ultimately leads to the flooding of the district.

Several types of change are shown as affecting the village. Firstly, new inventions and techniques are shown as having an effect. Motorized transport means that people are able to widen their horizons and their social circle, so that the old problems of close relatives marrying and producing genetically defective children are likely to be eliminated. Tinned produce is making some of the old handcrafts and culinary methods obsolete: people are developing a taste for tinned goods, bottled beer and commercially produced bacon. It is also hinted that some of the economic hardships of the Depression are contributing to these small changes: pig feed is now expensive, making it more difficult for small-scale homesteaders to keep pigs and cure their own bacon.

Another social change shown in the novel is the role of women. In the past, women of lower social status would "go into service" as housemaids before marriage, while wealthier women were expected to make a good marriage and not to work at all. However, one can see the young women mentioned in this book trying to make their own livings. Hilary Thorpe is the best example, as she is taking the rather radical steps of attending university - universities had only just started to give degrees to women during this period - and planning to make her own living and having a career as an author. Even inheriting wealth does not make her turn from her career plans, and she dislikes the idea of acting like a conventional heiress and marrying. At the other end of the social scale, the reader learns that Blundell's daughters are working in secretarial roles rather than as maids.

World War I is shown as having an effect on society, although it is more obvious to see the effects on French society rather than English society. Suzanne LeGros is probably typical in losing most of the able-bodied men in her life, leaving her to manage a farm single-handedly as a young woman. The way that trench warfare, with its retreats and bombings, affected the civilian farmers in France is also hinted at. It is also reasonable to assume that the Depression is partly responsible for some of the financial problems



of the LeGros farm, prompting Deacon to return to England to get the emeralds. It is also hinted that Sir Henry Thorpe's weakness is a result of his wartime experiences.

It is also clear how the influenza epidemic affected everyday people, with many people in a small community being affected by the disease, and many people dying - this is what kills Lady Thorpe.



# Style

## Point of View

The *Nine Tailors* is told using omniscient third person narration. Frequently, the author takes the reader inside a character's thoughts. These inner thoughts, although told in the third person, usually stay in character. At one point, this third person narrative is presented as a stream-of-consciousness passage, where one can see every stray thought flitting through Lord Peter's brain as he listens to the funeral service for the mystery man, hearing the bell tolling and puzzling out the mystery. Several characters are chosen for the author to "step inside", with the most common ones being Lord Peter, Mr. Blundell, Hilary Thorpe, and occasionally Mrs. Venables. At other times, especially during descriptions of the countryside, the third-person narrative uses less of the "angel on the shoulder" technique and more of the "eye of God" technique, able to see the whole countryside in detail and give broad details.

"Author talking" is occasionally used, although the author never directly addresses the reader. "Author talking" is used to provide commentary on a number of points, such as the process of tracing Suzanne LeGros. This technique is used most extensively during the explanation of what change-ringing is and how it works.

Another notable feature of the point of view and narrative technique is that many scenes, such as the finding of the body and Bunter's acquisition of the letter, are not shown directly but are reported in dialogue by a character. In the case of the finding of the corpse, this technique may be used to soften the potential horror or disgust of the scene. By using a character to recount the events, this allows the author to avoid lurid descriptions without sacrificing detail or realism, as well as giving a chance for the characters to reveal more about themselves.

## Setting

This novel is mostly set in the Fen country of England during the 1920s.

The setting is primarily rural rather than urban, and the reader is given a picture of village life in the England of the day. The community is closely-knit and everybody knows everybody else, so strangers are a novelty and can sometimes be treated with suspicion. Village life seems to revolve around the rural economy - market day casts a hush over all towns and villages except the market town itself - and the life of the church. The church seems to loom large in the village, both physically and mentally. The church is the largest building in the village and stand on the only high ground - a twelve-foot hill - in the countryside. The church bells are used as a sort of "bush telegraph" to announce deaths and marriages in the area, as well as being rung for alarms, celebrations and to call the faithful to worship. The church also serves as an evacuation center where all the community gathers during the floods.



St Paul's church is a key part of the setting, and much of the mystery takes place within the church and its grounds. Notable features of the church include its high bell tower with its ring of eight bells and the carved and gilded angels decorating the roof. The interior of the church is quite large, as the church itself was once an abbey. The tomb of one of the most notable abbots, who arranged for the bell Batty Thomas, named after him, to be made, is found in the church. The church itself is very old, with some features dating back to the Norman period (the 1100s).

The Red House is the other notable place in the village of Fenchurch St. Paul. This is a stately home belonging to the Thorpe family where Jeff Deacon once worked and where he committed the robbery of the Wilbraham emeralds.

The Fens are located in the east coast of England in the south of Lincolnshire. The countryside is flat and low-lying, and it is criss-crossed with dikes and drainage systems that are designed to control flooding and to reclaim the countryside from swampland. A number of governing bodies are responsible for the various parts of this drainage system, and sometimes, parts of the system are neglected. Specifically, the sluice-gates on Van Leyden's Sluice and the Wale river are in bad order. The combination of the bad gates plus the extra water diverted into Van Leyden's Sluice by the New Wash Cut during heavy rainfall at spring tide produces a flood in the area.

A few scenes are set outside the Fens. Other settings include a French farm in an area close to where the battle of the Marne was fought, and a prison infirmary.

The setting in time is highlighted by the influence that two key historical events have on the everyday characters in the novel. These events are the influenza epidemic and World War I. The influenza is shown sweeping through a small community, killing many. The war plays a smaller role, but it is shown as hampering the police force - as Jeff Deacon broke out of prison during the war, the police were not able to trace him straight away, and the war was having a large effect on the population in France.

## Language and Meaning

The style used by Dorothy Sayers throughout the novel is rather intellectual, employing an extensive vocabulary, numerous allusions to various works of literature, and phrases in Latin and French that are presented to the reader without translation. In many ways, Dorothy Sayers assumed that her work would be read by highly-educated people like herself, or else she was hoping that exposure to her writing would be educational in its own right. This was rather innovative during the time when Sayers was writing, where mystery and crime fiction was often sensationalized, lurid and targeted to the masses. In this novel, Dorothy Sayers attempts to write in a "classy" literary style and tone while staying with the plot conventions and expectations of the "whodunnit" genre.

Vocabulary and sentence structure are used very subtly in the chapter set in France. In this chapter, the choice of words and their order are carefully chosen to sound slightly "foreign". This emphasizes to the reader that the conversations taking place in the



chapter were conducted in French rather than in English. French phrases are also sprinkled throughout this chapter to reinforce the foreign setting. However, understanding these phrases is not crucial to the plot, and a reader with a wide English vocabulary can figure out their meaning from context and cognate words.

The novel's narrative style is highly detailed, with characters and settings described very vividly. Some of these descriptions, most notably of the setting, are based on Sayer's own experiences, as she grew up in the countryside and used as the setting for this novel, and her father was an Anglican (Episcopalian) minister. Even minor characters are presented with attention to detail and the cast of characters includes very few "cardboard cutouts". Character is revealed as many key scenes are told in reported speeches that convey not only the crucial facts but also show the vocabulary, accent and concerns of the speaker.

One very distinctive feature used in this novel is the use of change-ringing jargon. These are used for creating the chapter titles, and each title finds a double meaning in the jargon that gives an indication of the events of the chapter. For example, the chapter title "Mr. Gotobed is Called with a Double" is not only bell-ringing jargon but also indicates that Mr. Gotobed finds a second body that shouldn't be there in Lady Thorpe's grave; another example is "Monsieur Rozier Hunts the Treble Down", a chapter where M. Rozier finds and interrogates Suzanne (in music, the "treble" involves higher notes that fall within the range of a woman's voice). These chapter titles are also accompanied by quotes taken from other works that also have some relevance to the events of the chapter. Some of these quotes are taken from works on change-ringing, while others are taken from the Bible and some supernatural thrillers - two of the thrillers ("Wylder's Hand" by Sheridan Le Fanu and "The Rosamonde" by Julian Sermet) are mentioned within the events of the novel, as is the Bible.

The cipher that plays a key role in part of the mystery also combines the literary style of Le Fanu with bell-ringing and the Bible, as Sayers creates a cipher text that imitates Le Fanu's style while using a method of change ringing to spell out a hidden message within this text. The hidden message revealed produces three verses from the Psalms that indicate the hiding place of the emeralds.

## Structure

As the full title suggests, this novel is divided into four main parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters, which are of roughly equal length.

The first part (A Short Touch of Kent Treble Bob Major) sets the scene for the mystery. The setting, the theme and the main characters are introduced. At this stage, there is no hint of any mystery, and the action takes place prior to the finding of the dead man.

The second part (A Full Peal of Grandsire Triples) is the longest. The main mystery is introduced, as is the backstory. The events in this chapter take place during the space of a few continuous months, with a gap in time appearing between the first part and the



second. All major characters appear and play their roles. This section introduces many questions to the reader, and answers one. The one answered question relates to the emeralds: the cipher leading to their whereabouts is cracked and the emeralds are found and returned to their rightful owner. Questions remaining to be answered include the true identity of Jean LeGros, the roles played by Will and James Thoday, the role played by Cranton, and the way that the dead man was killed. The setting is primarily within Fenchurch St. Paul, apart from two brief interludes to interview Cranton and Suzanne LeGros.

In the third part (A Short Touch of Stedman's Triples), all the questions are solved, and the opening of the first chapter in the part announces that Lord Peter has found the answers to the questions posed in the previous section - with the exception of how the man died. As this novel is a "whodunnit," this suggests to the reader that all the necessary clues have been presented: the reader could also solve the mystery at this point, and the reader has the option of re-reading the previous sections to find the necessary clues. This part is much more spread out in time, and many months are passed over briefly.

The fourth part (A Full Peal of Kent Treble Bob Major) clears up the final mystery and takes place several months after the previous sections. In this section, the flood that has been foreshadowed in the previous parts happens and during this flood the mystery of how Jeff Deacon died is solved and the person who is most responsible is killed, meaning that no further legal proceedings need to be taken.





## Quotes

"[t]he bells are said to be jealous of the presence of evil. Perhaps God speaks through those mouths of inarticulate metal. He is a righteous judge, strong and patient, and is provoked every day."

The Bells are Rung Down, p. 397

"Nine tailors make a man"

Quotation appears throughout text

"See here, James - if you didn't kill him, who did?"

The Slow Work, p. 350

"Dig up one thing,' thought Wimsey, 'and you have to dig up another. I wish we'd never dug up Deacon. Once you let the tide in, it's got to go somewhere.'"

The Slow Work, p. 346

"Beastly things...They've killed grandfather, and practically killed Dad, and they've killed Deacon and they'll kill somebody else before long. I wouldn't touch them with a barge-pole."

The Slow Work ,p. 340

"There ain't no end to the wrong that devil done us. He ruined my poor Mary and brought her into the dock once, and he robbed her of her good name and made bastards of our little girls...If ever a man deserved killing, he's the one."

Will Thoday Goes in Quick and Comes out Slow, p. 327

"Bells are like cats and mirrors - they're always queer, and it doesn't pay to think too much about them."

Nobby Goes in Slow and Comes out Quick, p. 232

"And over all, the bells tumbled and wrangled, shouting their alarm across the country. Gaude, Sabaoth, John, Jericho, Jubilee, Dimity, Batty Thomas and Tailor Paul - awake! make haste! save yourselves! The deep waters have gone over us! They call us with the noise of the cataracts!"

The Waters are Called Home, p. 386

"Nobody found them. Nobody killed anybody for them. Nobody deciphered the cryptogram. We're wrong, wrong, out of the hunt and wrong!"

'But we've got the emeralds.'"

Lord Peter is Called Wrong, p. 298

"Fool that he was - climbing up among the bells to look for cherubims when they were here over his head, gazing down at him, their blank golden eyes blind with excess of



light."

Lord Peter is Called Wrong, p. 283

"The bells! the bells! Must go to the church. Don't tell Mary."

Emily Turns Bunter from Behind, p. 279

"Money,' Will says. 'Tis a great wickedness, is money."

Plain Hunting, p. 230

"The bells du know well who's a-haulin' of 'un. Wunnerful understanding, they is. They can't abide a wicked man. They lays in wait to overthrow 'un... Yew ain't no call to be afeared of the bells if so be as yew follows righteousness."

The Quick Work, p. 308

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out...' except our secrets, old Patriarch; we take those with us, all right."

Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt, p. 129

"If anything can be said to be myster'ous, it's this here death."

Lord Peter is Called into the Hunt, p. 129

"And they say,' thought Wimsey, 'that Church of England parsons do nothing for their money."

The Bells in their Courses, p. 61



## Topics for Discussion

One of the thematic ideas of this novel is that church bells cannot tolerate the presence of evil. Explain how this idea is illustrated by the reactions of various characters to the church bells.

Are Will Thoday's actions justified? Did he act rightly or wrongly? If he acted wrongly, what should he have done instead?

This novel gives a portrait of village life 1920s England. Describe what was characteristic about this lifestyle, along with the positive and negative aspects of village community life.

This novel is set during a time of great social upheaval. Describe how each of the following affect society as illustrated in *The Nine Tailors*:

- (a) World War I
- (b) The influenza epidemic
- (c) The Depression.

We learn a lot about what characters are like by how they interact with other characters. Explain what is revealed about Lord Peter Wimsey in his interactions with three of the characters selected from the list below:

- (a) Hilary Thorpe
- (b) Will Thoday
- (c) Potty Peake
- (d) Monsieur Rozier
- (e) Mr. and Mrs. Ashton
- (f) Hezekiah Lavender

Reverend Venables is in many ways an idealized portrait of an Anglican/Episcopalian minister. Describe how he refutes the idea that "Church of England parsons do nothing for their money".

This novel is a "whodunnit" with subtle clues planted in a way that the reader does not recognize their significance at first reading. Describe three examples of this type of subtle clue-planting. Your answer should explain the clue, the way it is "camouflaged" so the reader overlooks it, and the significance of the clue as revealed later.



How do the emeralds influence the action of the plot?

Three main mysteries are presented to the reader in this novel: the identity and history of the corpse, the whereabouts of the stolen emeralds and who killed Jeff Deacon. Choose one of these and explain how it is solved. Your answer should cover the following:

- (a) The key questions related to the mystery
- (b) The answers to these questions
- (c) The clues (events, discoveries and stories) that lead to these answers being found.

Bells and bell-ringing (campanology) is a very dominant motif in this novel. Explain how the vicar's enthusiasm for campanology effects the plot.