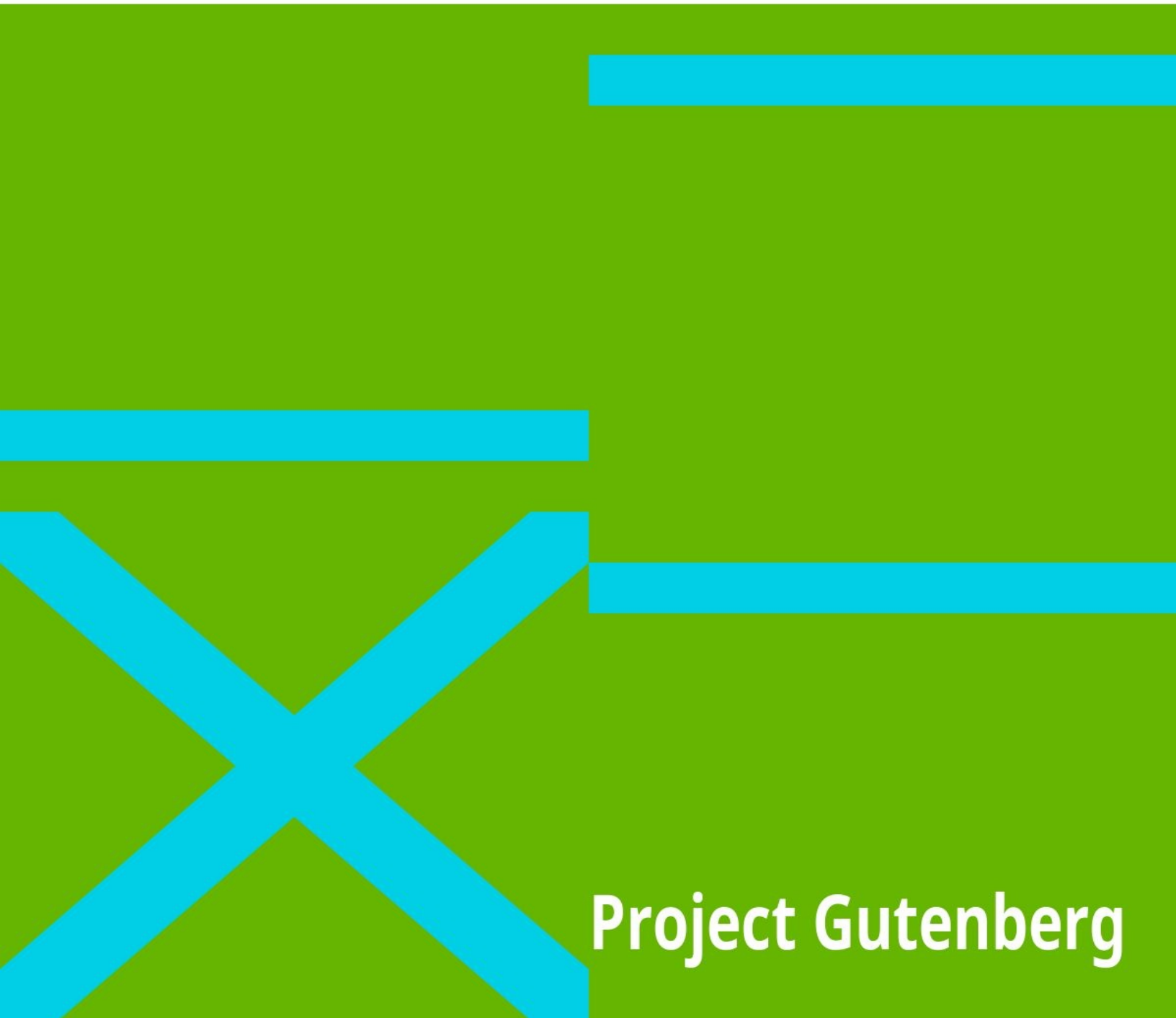
Revenge!

Robert Barr



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REVENGE!

BY

ROBERT BARR

TO

JAMES SAMSON, M.D.

[Illustration: "I HAD THE SAFE BLOWN OPEN"]

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REVENGE!

AN ALPINE DIVORCE.

In some natures there are no half-tones; nothing but raw primary colours. John Bodman was a man who was always at one extreme or the other. This probably would have mattered little had he not married a wife whose nature was an exact duplicate of his own.

Doubtless there exists in this world precisely the right woman for any given man to marry and *vice versâ;* but when you consider that a human being has the opportunity of being acquainted with only a few hundred people, and out of the few hundred that there are but a dozen or less whom he knows intimately, and out of the dozen, one or two friends at most, it will easily be seen, when we remember the number of millions who inhabit this world, that probably, since the earth was created, the right man has never yet met the right woman. The mathematical chances are all against such a meeting, and this is the reason that divorce courts exist. Marriage at best is but a compromise, and if two people happen to be united who are of an uncompromising nature there is trouble.

In the lives of these two young people there was no middle distance. The result was bound to be either love or hate, and in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bodman it was hate of the most bitter and arrogant kind.

In some parts of the world incompatibility of temper is considered a just cause for obtaining a divorce, but in England no such subtle distinction is made, and so until the wife became criminal, or the man became both criminal and cruel, these two were linked together by a bond that only death could sever. Nothing can be worse than this state of things, and the matter was only made the more hopeless by the fact that Mrs. Bodman lived a blameless life, and her husband was no worse, but rather better, than the majority of men. Perhaps, however, that statement held only up to a certain point, for John Bodman had reached a state of

mind in which he resolved to get rid of his wife at all hazards. If he had been a poor man he would probably have deserted her, but he was rich, and a man cannot freely leave a prospering business because his domestic life happens not to be happy.

When a man's mind dwells too much on any one subject, no one can tell just how far he will go. The mind is a delicate instrument, and even the law recognises that it is easily thrown from its balance. Bodman's friends—for he had friends—claim that his mind was unhinged; but neither his friends nor his enemies suspected the truth of the episode, which turned out to be the most important, as it was the most ominous, event in his life.

Whether John Bodman was sane or insane at the time he made up his mind to murder his wife, will never be known, but there was certainly craftiness in the method he devised to make the crime appear the result of an accident. Nevertheless, cunning is often a quality in a mind that has gone wrong.

Mrs. Bodman well knew how much her presence afflicted her husband, but her nature was as relentless as his, and her hatred of him was, if possible, more bitter than his hatred of her. Wherever he went she accompanied him, and perhaps the idea of murder would never have occurred to him if she had not been so persistent in forcing her presence upon him at all times and on all occasions. So, when he announced to her that he intended to spend the month of July in Switzerland, she said nothing, but made her preparations for the journey. On this occasion he did not protest, as was usual with him, and so to Switzerland this silent couple departed.

There is an hotel near the mountain-tops which stands on a ledge over one of the great glaciers. It is a mile and a half above the level of the sea, and it stands alone, reached by a toilsome road that zigzags up the mountain for six miles. There is a wonderful view of snow-peaks and glaciers from the verandahs of this hotel, and in the neighbourhood are many picturesque walks to points more or less dangerous.

John Bodman knew the hotel well, and in happier days he had been intimately acquainted with the vicinity. Now that the thought of murder arose in his mind, a certain spot two miles distant from this inn continually haunted him. It was a point of view overlooking everything, and its extremity was protected by a low and crumbling wall. He arose one morning at four o'clock, slipped unnoticed out

of the hotel, and went to this point, which was locally named the Hanging Outlook. His memory had served him well. It was exactly the spot, he said to himself. The mountain which rose up behind it was wild and precipitous. There were no inhabitants near to overlook the place. The distant hotel was hidden by a shoulder of rock. The mountains on the other side of the valley were too far away to make it possible for any casual tourist or native to see what was going on on the Hanging Outlook. Far down in the valley the only town in view seemed like a collection of little toy houses.

One glance over the crumbling wall at the edge was generally sufficient for a visitor of even the strongest nerves. There was a sheer drop of more than a mile straight down, and at the distant bottom were jagged rocks and stunted trees that looked, in the blue haze, like shrubbery.

"This is the spot," said the man to himself, "and to-morrow morning is the time."

John Bodman had planned his crime as grimly and relentlessly, and as coolly, as ever he had concocted a deal on the Stock Exchange. There was no thought in his mind of mercy for his unconscious victim. His hatred had carried him far.

The next morning after breakfast, he said to his wife: "I intend to take a walk in the mountains. Do you wish to come with me?"

"Yes," she answered briefly.

"Very well, then," he said; "I shall be ready at nine o'clock."

"I shall be ready at nine o'clock," she repeated after him.

At that hour they left the hotel together, to which he was shortly to return alone. The spoke no word to each other on their way to the Hanging Outlook. The path was practically level, skirting the mountains, for the Hanging Outlook was not much higher above the sea than the hotel.

John Bodman had formed no fixed plan for his procedure when the place was reached. He resolved to be guided by circumstances. Now and then a strange fear arose in his mind that she might cling to him and possibly drag him over the precipice with her. He found himself wondering whether she had any premonition of her fate, and one of his reasons for not speaking was the fear that a tremor in his voice might possibly arouse her suspicions. He resolved that his

action should be sharp and sudden, that she might have no chance either to help herself or to drag him with her. Of her screams in that desolate region he had no fear. No one could reach the spot except from the hotel, and no one that morning had left the house, even for an expedition to the glacier—one of the easiest and most popular trips from the place.

Curiously enough, when they came within sight of the Hanging Outlook, Mrs. Bodman stopped and shuddered. Bodman looked at her through the narrow slits of his veiled eyes, and wondered again if she had any suspicion. No one can tell, when two people walk closely together, what unconscious communication one mind may have with another.

"What is the matter?" he asked gruffly. "Are you tired?"

"John," she cried, with a gasp in her voice, calling him by his Christian name for the first time in years, "don't you think that if you had been kinder to me at first, things might have been different?"

"It seems to me," he answered, not looking at her, "that it is rather late in the day for discussing that question."

"I have much to regret," she said quaveringly. "Have you nothing?"

"No," he answered.

"Very well," replied his wife, with the usual hardness returning to her voice. "I was merely giving you a chance. Remember that."

Her husband looked at her suspiciously.

"What do you mean?" he asked, "giving me a chance? I want no chance nor anything else from you. A man accepts nothing from one he hates. My feeling towards you is, I imagine, no secret to you. We are tied together, and you have done your best to make the bondage insupportable."

"Yes," she answered, with her eyes on the ground, "we are tied together—we are tied together!"

She repeated these words under her breath as they walked the few remaining steps to the Outlook. Bodman sat down upon the crumbling wall. The woman

dropped her alpenstock on the rock, and walked nervously to and fro, clasping and unclasping her hands. Her husband caught his breath as the terrible moment drew near.

"Why do you walk about like a wild animal?" he cried. "Come here and sit down beside me, and be still."

She faced him with a light he had never before seen in her eyes—a light of insanity and of hatred.

"I walk like a wild animal," she said, "because I am one. You spoke a moment ago of your hatred of me; but you are a man, and your hatred is nothing to mine. Bad as you are, much as you wish to break the bond which ties us together, there are still things which I know you would not stoop to. I know there is no thought of murder in your heart, but there is in mine. I will show you, John Bodman, how much I hate you."

The man nervously clutched the stone beside him, and gave a guilty start as she mentioned murder.

"Yes," she continued, "I have told all my friends in England that I believed you intended to murder me in Switzerland."

"Good God!" he cried. "How could you say such a thing?"

"I say it to show how much I hate you—how much I am prepared to give for revenge. I have warned the people at the hotel, and when we left two men followed us. The proprietor tried to persuade me not to accompany you. In a few moments those two men will come in sight of the Outlook. Tell them, if you think they will believe you, that it was an accident."

The mad woman tore from the front of her dress shreds of lace and scattered them around. Bodman started up to his feet, crying, "What are you about?" But before he could move toward her she precipitated herself over the wall, and went shrieking and whirling down the awful abyss.

The next moment two men came hurriedly round the edge of the rock, and found the man standing alone. Even in his bewilderment he realised that if he told the truth he would not be believed.

WHICH WAS THE MURDERER?

Mrs. John Forder had no premonition of evil. When she heard the hall clock strike nine she was blithely singing about the house as she attended to her morning duties, and she little imagined that she was entering the darkest hour of her life, and that before the clock struck again overwhelming disaster would have fallen upon her. Her young husband was working in the garden, as was his habit each morning before going to his office. She expected him in every moment to make ready for his departure down town. She heard the click of the front gate, and a moment later some angry words. Alarmed, she was about to look through the parted curtains of the bay-window in front when the sharp crack of a revolver rang out, and she hastened to the door with a vague sinking fear at her heart. As she flung open the door she saw two things— first, her husband lying face downwards on the grass motionless, his right arm doubled under him; second, a man trying frantically to undo the fastening of the front gate, with a smoking pistol still in his hand.

Human lives often hang on trivialities. The murderer in his anxiety to be undisturbed had closed the front gate tightly. The wall was so high as to shut out observation from the street, but the height that made it difficult for an outsider to see over it also rendered escape impossible. If the man had left the gate open he might have got away unnoticed, but, as it was, Mrs. Forder's screams aroused the neighbourhood, and before the murderer succeeded in undoing the fastening, a crowd had collected with a policeman in its centre, and escape was out of the question. Only one shot had been fired, but at such close quarters that the bullet went through the body. John Forder was not dead, but lay on the grass insensible. He was carried into the house and the family physician summoned. The doctor sent for a specialist to assist him, and the two men consulted together. To the distracted woman they were able to give small comfort. The case at best was a doubtful one. There was some hope of ultimate recovery, but very little.

Meanwhile the murderer lay in custody, his own fate depending much on the fate

of his victim. If Forder died, bail would be refused; if he showed signs of recovering, his assailant had a chance for, at least, temporary liberty. No one in the city, unless it were the wife herself, was more anxious for Forder's recovery than the man who had shot him.

The crime had its origin in a miserable political quarrel—mere wrangle about offices. Walter Radnor, the assassin, had 'claims' upon an office, and, rightly or wrongly, he attributed his defeat to the secret machinations of John Forder. He doubtless did not intend to murder his enemy that morning when he left home, but heated words had speedily followed the meeting, and the revolver was handy in his hip pocket.

Radnor had a strong, political backing, and, even after he stretched his victim on the grass, he had not expected to be so completely deserted when the news spread through the city. Life was not then so well protected as it has since become, and many a man who walked the streets free had, before that time, shot his victim. But in this case the code of assassination had been violated. Radnor had shot down an unarmed man in his own front garden and almost in sight of his wife. He gave his victim no chance. If Forder had had even an unloaded revolver in any of his pockets, things would not have looked so black for Radnor, because his friends could have held that he had fired in self- defence, as they would doubtless claim that the dying man had been the first to show a weapon. So Radnor, in the city prison, found that even the papers of his own political party were against him, and that the town was horrified at what it considered a cold-blooded crime.

As time went on Radnor and his few friends began once more to hope. Forder still lingered between life and death. That he would ultimately die from his wound was regarded as certain, but the law required that a man should die within a stated time after the assault had been committed upon him, otherwise the assailant could not be tried for murder. The limit provided by the law was almost reached and Forder still lived. Time also worked in Radnor's favour in another direction. The sharp indignation that had followed the crime had become dulled. Other startling events occurred which usurped the place held by the Forder tragedy, and Radnor's friends received more and more encouragement.

Mrs. Forder nursed her husband assiduously, hoping against hope. They had been married less than a year, and their love for each other had increased as time went on. Her devotion to her husband had now become almost fanatical, and the

physicians were afraid to tell her how utterly hopeless the case was, fearing that if the truth became known to her, she would break down both mentally and physically. Her hatred of the man who had wrought this misery was so deep and intense that once when she spoke of him to her brother, who was a leading lawyer in the place, he saw, with grave apprehension, the light of insanity in her eyes. Fearful for a breakdown in health, the physicians insisted that she should walk for a certain time each day, and as she refused to go outside of the gate, she took her lonely promenade up and down a long path in the deserted garden. One day she heard a conversation on the other side of the wall that startled her.

"That is the house," said a voice, "where Forder lives, who was shot by Walter Radnor. The murder took place just behind this wall."

"Did it really?" queried a second voice. "I suppose Radnor is rather an anxious man this week."

"Oh," said the first, "he has doubtless been anxious enough all along."

"True. But still if Forder lives the week out, Radnor will escape the gallows. If Forder were to die this week it would be rather rough on his murderer, for his case would come up before Judge Brent, who is known all over the State as a hanging judge. He has no patience with crimes growing out of politics, and he is certain to charge dead against Radnor, and carry the jury with him. I tell you that the man in jail will be the most joyous person in this city on Sunday morning if Forder is still alive, and I understand his friends have bail ready, and that he will be out of jail first thing Monday morning."

The two unseen persons, having now satisfied their curiosity by their scrutiny of the house, passed on and left Mrs. Forder standing looking into space, with her nervous hands clasped tightly together.

Coming to herself she walked quickly to the house and sent a messenger for her brother. He found her pacing up and down the room.

"How is John to-day?" he said.

"Still the same, still the same," was the answer. "It seems to me he is getting weaker and weaker. He does not recognise me any more."

"What do the doctors say?"

"Oh, how can I tell you? I don't suppose they speak the truth to me, but when they come again I shall insist upon knowing just what they think. But tell me this: is it true that if John lives through the week his murderer will escape?"

"How do you mean, escape?"

"Is it the law of the State that if my husband lives till the end of this week, the man who shot him will not be tried for murder?"

"He will not be tried for murder," said the lawyer, "but he may not be tried for murder even if John were to die now. His friends will doubtless try to make it out a case of manslaughter as it is; or perhaps they will try to get him off on the ground of self-defence. Still, I don't think they would have much of a chance, especially as his case will come before Judge Brent; but if John lives past twelve o'clock on Saturday night, it is the law of the State that Radnor cannot be tried for murder. Then, at most, he will get a term of years in a state prison, but that will not bother him to any great extent. He has a strong political backing, and if his party wins the next state election, which seems likely, the governor will doubtless pardon him out before a year is over."

"Is it possible," cried the wife, "that such an enormous miscarriage of justice can take place in a State that pretends to be civilised?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "I don't bank much on our civilisation," he said. "Such things occur every year, and many times a year."

The wife walked up and down the room, while her brother tried to calm and soothe her.

"It is terrible—it is awful!" she cried, "that such a dastardly crime may go unavenged!"

"My dear sister," said the lawyer, "do not let your mind dwell so much on vengeance. Remember that whatever happens to the villain who caused all this misery, it can neither help nor injure your husband."

"Revenge!" cried the woman, suddenly turning upon her brother; "I swear before God that if that man escapes, I will kill him with my own hand!"

The lawyer was too wise to say anything to his sister in her present frame of

mind, and after doing what he could to comfort her he departed.

On Saturday morning Mrs. Forder confronted the physicians.

"I want to know," she said, "and I want to know definitely, whether there is the slightest chance of my husband's recovery or not. This suspense is slowly killing me, and I must know the truth, and I must know it now."

The physicians looked one at the other. "I think," said the elder, "that it is useless to keep you longer in suspense. There is not the slightest hope of your husband's recovery. He may live for a week or for a month perhaps, or he may die at any moment."

"I thank you, gentlemen," said Mrs. Forder, with a calmness that astonished the two men, who knew the state of excitement she had laboured under for a long time past. "I thank you. I think it is better that I should know."

All the afternoon she sat by the bedside of her insensible and scarcely breathing husband. His face was wasted to a shadow from his long contest with death. The nurse begged permission to leave the room for a few minutes, and the wife, who had been waiting for this, silently assented. When the woman had gone, Mrs. Forder, with tears streaming from her eyes, kissed her husband.

"John," she whispered, "you know and you will understand." She pressed his face to her bosom, and when his head fell back on the pillow her husband was smothered.

Mrs. Forder called for the nurse and sent for the doctors, but that which had happened was only what they had all expected.

* * * * *

To a man in the city jail the news of Forder's death brought a wild thrill of fear. The terrible and deadly charge of Judge Brent against the murderer doomed the victim, as every listener in the courthouse realised as soon as it was finished. The jury were absent but ten minutes, and the hanging of Walter Radnor did more perhaps than anything that ever happened in the State to make life within that commonwealth more secure than it had been before.

A DYNAMITE EXPLOSION

Dupré sat at one of the round tables in the Café Vernon, with a glass of absinthe before him, which he sipped every now and again. He looked through the open door, out to the Boulevard, and saw passing back and forth with the regularity of a pendulum, a uniformed policeman. Dupré laughed silently as he noticed this evidence of law and order. The Café Vernon was under the protection of the Government. The class to which Dupré belonged had sworn that it would blow the café into the next world, therefore the military-looking policeman walked to and fro on the pavement to prevent this being done, so that all honest citizens might see that the Government protects its own. People were arrested now and then for lingering around the café: they were innocent, of course, and by-and-by the Government found that out and let them go. The real criminal seldom acts suspiciously. Most of the arrested persons were merely attracted by curiosity. "There," said one to another, "the notorious Hertzog was arrested."

The real criminal goes quietly into the café, and orders his absinthe, as Dupré had done. And the policeman marches up and down keeping an eye on the guiltless. So runs the world.

There were few customers in the café, for people feared the vengeance of Hertzog's friends. They expected some fine day that the café would be blown to atoms, and they preferred to be taking their coffee and cognac somewhere else when that time came. It was evident that M. Sonne, the proprietor of the café, had done a poor stroke of business for himself when he gave information to the police regarding the whereabouts of Hertzog, notwithstanding the fact that his café became suddenly the most noted one in the city, and that it now enjoyed the protection of the Government.

Dupré seldom looked at the proprietor, who sat at the desk, nor at the waiter, who had helped the week before to overpower Hertzog. He seemed more intent on watching the minion of the law who paced back and forth in front of the door,

although he once glanced at the other minion who sat almost out of sight at the back of the café, scrutinising all who came in, especially those who had parcels of any kind. The café was well guarded, and M. Sonne, at the desk, appeared to be satisfied with the protection he was receiving.

When customers did come in they seldom sat at the round metal tables, but went direct to the zinc-covered bar, ordered their fluid and drank it standing, seeming in a hurry to get away. They nodded to M. Sonne and were evidently old frequenters of the café who did not wish him to think they had deserted him in this crisis, nevertheless they all had engagements that made prompt departure necessary. Dupré smiled grimly when he noticed this. He was the only man sitting at a table. He had no fears of being blown up. He knew that his comrades were more given to big talk than to action. He had not attended the last meeting, for he more than suspected the police had agents among them; besides, his friend and leader, Hertzog, had never attended meetings. That was why the police had had such difficulty in finding him. Hertzog had been a man of deeds not words. He had said to Dupré once, that a single determined man who kept his mouth shut, could do more against society than all the secret associations ever formed, and his own lurid career had proved the truth of this. But now he was in prison, and it was the treachery of M. Sonne that had sent him there. As he thought of this, Dupré cast a glance at the proprietor and gritted his teeth.

The policeman at the back of the hall, feeling lonely perhaps, walked to the door and nodded to his parading comrade. The other paused for a moment on his beat, and they spoke to each other. As the policeman returned to his place, Dupré said to him—

"Have a sip with me."

"Not while on duty," replied the officer with a wink.

"*Garçon,*" said Dupré quietly, "bring me a caraffe of brandy. *Fin champagne*."

The *garçon* placed the little marked decanter on the table with two glasses. Dupré filled them both. The policeman, with a rapid glance over his shoulder, tossed one off, and smacked his lips. Dupré slowly sipped the other while he asked—

"Do you anticipate any trouble here?"

"Not in the least," answered the officer confidently. "Talk, that's all."

"I thought so," said Dupré.

"They had a meeting the other night—a secret meeting;" the policeman smiled a little as he said this. "They talked a good deal. They are going to do wonderful things. A man was detailed to carry out this job."

"And have you arrested him?" questioned Dupré.

"Oh dear, no. We watch him merely. He is the most frightened man in the city to-night. We expect him to come and tell us all about it, but we hope he won't. We know more about it than he does."

"I dare say; still it must have hurt M. Sonne's business a good deal."

"It has killed it for the present. People are such cowards. But the Government will make it all right with him out of the secret fund. He won't lose anything."

"Does he own the whole house, or only the café?"

"The whole house. He lets the upper rooms, but nearly all the tenants have left. Yet I call it the safest place in the city. They are all poltroons, the dynamiters, and they are certain to strike at some place not so well guarded. They are all well known to us, and the moment one is caught prowling about here he will be arrested. They are too cowardly to risk their liberty by coming near this place. It's a different thing from leaving a tin can and fuse in some dark corner when nobody is looking. Any fool can do that."

"Then you think this would be a good time to take a room here? I am looking for one in this neighbourhood," said Dupré.

"You couldn't do better than arrange with M. Sonne. You could make a good bargain with him now, and you would be perfectly safe."

"I am glad that you mentioned it; I will speak to M. Sonne to-night, and see the rooms to-morrow. Have another sip of brandy?"

"No, thank you, I must be getting back to my place. Just tell M. Sonne, if you take a room, that I spoke to you about it."

"I will. Good-night."

Dupré paid his bill and tipped the *garçon* liberally. The proprietor was glad to hear of any one wanting rooms. It showed the tide was turning, and an appointment was made for next day.

Dupré kept his appointment, and the *concierge* showed him over the house. The back rooms were too dark, the windows being but a few feet from the opposite wall. The lower front rooms were too noisy. Dupré said that he liked quiet, being a student. A front room on the third floor, however, pleased him, and he took it. He well knew the necessity of being on good terms with the *concierge*, who would spy on him anyhow, so he paid just a trifle more than requisite to that functionary, but not enough to arouse suspicion. Too much is as bad as too little, a fact that Dupré was well aware of.

He had taken pains to see that his window was directly over the front door of the café, but now that he was alone and the door locked, he scrutinised the position more closely. There was an awning over the front of the café that shut off his view of the pavement and the policeman marching below. That complicated matters. Still he remembered that when the sun went down the awning was rolled up. His first idea when he took the room was to drop the dynamite from the third story window to the pavement below, but the more he thought of that plan the less he liked it. It was the sort of thing any fool could do, as the policeman had said. It would take some thinking over. Besides, dynamite dropped on the pavement would, at most, but blow in the front of the shop, kill the perambulating policeman perhaps, or some innocent passer-by, but it would not hurt old Sonne nor yet the *garçon* who had made himself so active in arresting Hertzog.

Dupré was a methodical man. He spoke quite truly when he said he was a student. He now turned his student training on the case as if it were a problem in mathematics.

First, the dynamite must be exploded inside the café. Second, the thing must be done so deftly that no suspicion could fall on the perpetrator. Third, revenge was no revenge when it (A) killed the man who fired the mine, or (B) left a trail that would lead to his arrest.

Dupré sat down at his table, thrust his hands in his pockets, stretched out his

legs, knit his brows, and set himself to solve the conundrum. He could easily take a handbag filled with explosive material into the café. He was known there, but not as a friend of Hertzog's. He was a customer and a tenant, therefore doubly safe. But he could not leave the bag there, and if he stayed with it his revenge would rebound on himself. He could hand the bag to the waiter saying he would call for it again, but the waiter would naturally wonder why he did not give it to the *concierge*, and have it sent to his rooms; besides, the *garçon* was wildly suspicious. The waiter felt his unfortunate position. He dare not leave the Café Vernon, for he now knew that he was a marked man. At the Vernon he had police protection, while if he went anywhere else he would have no more safeguard than any other citizen; so he stayed on at the Vernon, such a course being, he thought, the least of two evils. But he watched every incomer much more sharply than did the policeman.

Dupré also realised that there was another difficulty about the handbag scheme. The dynamite must be set off either by a fuse or by clockwork machinery. A fuse caused smoke, and the moment a man touched a bag containing clockwork his hand felt the thrill of moving machinery. A man who hears for the first time the buzz of the rattlesnake's signal, like the shaking of dry peas in a pod, springs instinctively aside, even though he knows nothing of snakes. How much more, therefore, would a suspicious waiter, whose nerves were all alert for the soft, deadly purr of dynamite mechanism, spoil everything the moment his hand touched the bag? Yes, Dupré reluctantly admitted to himself, the handbag theory was not practical. It led to either self-destruction or prison.

What then was the next thing, as fuse or mechanism were unavailable? There was the bomb that exploded when it struck, and Dupré had himself made several. A man might stand in the middle of the street and shy it in through the open door. But then he might miss the doorway. Also until the hour the café closed the street was as light as day. Then the policeman was all alert for people in the middle of the street. His own safety depended upon it too. How was the man in the street to be dispensed with, yet the result attained? If the Boulevard was not so wide, a person on the opposite side in a front room might fire a dynamite bomb across, as they do from dynamite guns, but then there was—

"By God!" cried Dupré, "I have it!"

He drew in his outstretched legs, went to the window and threw it open, gazing down for a moment at the pavement below. He must measure the distance at

night—and late at night too—he said to himself. He bought a ball of cord, as nearly the colour of the front of the building as possible. He left his window open, and after midnight ran the cord out till he estimated that it about reached the top of the café door. He stole quietly down and let himself out, leaving the door unlatched. The door to the apartments was at the extreme edge of the building, while the café doors were in the middle, with large windows on each side. As he came round to the front, his heart almost ceased to beat when a voice from the café door said—

"What do you want? What are you doing here at this hour?"

The policeman had become so much a part of the pavement in Dupré's mind that he had actually forgotten the officer was there night and day. Dupré allowed himself the luxury of one silent gasp, then his heart took up its work again.

"I was looking for you," he said quietly. By straining his eyes he noticed at the same moment that the cord dangled about a foot above the policeman's head, as he stood in the dark doorway.

[Illustration: THE CORD DANGLED ABOUT A FOOT ABOVE THE POLICEMAN'S
HEAD]

"I was looking for you. I suppose you don't know of any—any chemist's shop open so late as this? I have a raging toothache and can't sleep, and I want to get something for it."

"Oh, the chemist's at the corner is open all night. Ring the bell at the right hand."

"I hate to disturb them for such a trifle."

"That's what they're there for," said the officer philosophically.

"Would you mind standing at the other door till I get back? I'll be as quick as I can. I don't wish to leave it open unprotected, and I don't want to close it, for the *concierge* knows I'm in and he is afraid to open it when any one rings late. You know me, of course; I'm in No. 16."

"Yes, I recognise you now, though I didn't at first. I will stand by the door until you return."

Dupré went to the corner shop and bought a bottle of toothache drops from the sleepy youth behind the counter. He roused him up however, and made him explain how the remedy was to be applied. He thanked the policeman, closed the door, and went up to his room. A second later the cord was cut at the window and quietly pulled in.

Dupré sat down and breathed hard for a few moments.

"You fool!" he said to himself; "a mistake or two like that and you are doomed. That's what comes of thinking too much on one branch of your subject. Another two feet and the string would have been down on his nose. I am certain he did not see it; I could hardly see it myself, looking for it. The guarding of the side door was an inspiration. But I must think well over every phase of the subject before acting again. This is a lesson."

As he went on with his preparations it astonished him to find how many various things had to be thought of in connexion with an apparently simple scheme, the neglect of any one of which would endanger the whole enterprise. His plan was a most uncomplicated one. All he had to do was to tie a canister of dynamite at the end of a string of suitable length, and at night, before the café doors were closed, fling it from his window so that the package would sweep in by the open door, strike against the ceiling of the café, and explode. First he thought of holding the end of the cord in his hand at the open window, but reflection showed him that if, in the natural excitement of the moment, he drew back or leant too far forward the package might strike the front of the house above the door, or perhaps hit the pavement. He therefore drove a stout nail in the window-sill and attached the end of the cord to that. Again, he had to render his canister of explosive so sensitive to any shock that he realised if he tied the cord around it and flung it out into the night the can might go off when the string was jerked tight and the explosion take place in mid-air above the street. So he arranged a spiral spring between can and cord to take up harmlessly the shock caused by the momentum of the package when the string became suddenly taut. He saw that the weak part of his project was the fact that everything would depend on his own nerve and accuracy of aim at the critical moment, and that a slight miscalculation to the right or to the left would cause the bomb, when falling down and in, to miss the door altogether. He would have but one chance, and there was no opportunity of practising. However, Dupré, who was a philosophical man, said to himself that if people allowed small technical difficulties to trouble them too much, nothing really worth doing would be

accomplished in this world. He felt sure he was going to make some little mistake that would ruin all his plans, but he resolved to do the best he could and accept the consequences with all the composure at his command.

As he stood by the window on the fatal night with the canister in his hand he tried to recollect if there was anything left undone or any tracks remaining uncovered. There was no light in his room, but a fire burned in the grate, throwing flickering reflections on the opposite wall.

"There are four things I must do," he murmured: "first, pull up the string; second, throw it in the fire; third, draw out the nail; fourth, close the window."

He was pleased to notice that his heart was not beating faster than usual. "I think I have myself well in hand, yet I must not be too cool when I get downstairs. There are so many things to think of all at one time," he said to himself with a sigh. He looked up and down the street. The pavement was clear. He waited until the policeman had passed the door. He would take ten steps before he turned on his beat. When his back was towards the café door Dupré launched his bomb out into the night.

[Illustration: DUPRÉ LAUNCHED HIS BOMB OUT INTO THE NIGHT]

He drew back instantly and watched the nail. It held when the jerk came. A moment later the whole building lurched like a drunken man, heaving its shoulders as it were. Dupré was startled by a great square of plaster coming down on his table with a crash. Below, there was a roar of muffled thunder. The floor trembled under him after the heave. The glass in the window clattered down, and he felt the air smite him on the breast as if some one had struck him a blow.

He looked out for a moment. The concussion had extinguished the street lamps opposite. All was dark in front of the café where a moment before the Boulevard was flooded with light. A cloud of smoke was rolling out from the lower part of the house.

"Four things," said Dupré, as he rapidly pulled in the cord. It was shrivelled at the end. Dupré did the other three things quickly.

Everything was strangely silent, although the deadened roar of the explosion still sounded dully in his ears. His boots crunched on the plaster as he walked across

the room and groped for the door. He had some trouble in pulling it open. It stuck so fast that he thought it was locked; then he remembered with a cold shiver of fear that the door had been unlocked all the time he had stood at the window with the canister in his hand.

"I have certainly done some careless thing like that which will betray me yet; I wonder what it is?"

He wrenched the door open at last. The lights in the hall were out; he struck a match, and made his way down. He thought he heard groans. As he went down, he found it was the *concierge* huddled in a corner.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, my God, my God!" cried the *concierge*, "I knew they would do it. We are all blown to atoms!"

"Get up," said Dupré, "you're not hurt; come with me and see if we can be of any use."

"I'm afraid of another explosion," groaned the *concierge*.

"Nonsense! There's never a second. Come along."

They found some difficulty in getting outside, and then it was through a hole in the wall and not through the door. The lower hall was wrecked.

Dupré expected to find a crowd, but there was no one there. He did not realise how short a time had elapsed since the disaster. The policeman was on his hands and knees in the street, slowly getting up, like a man in a dream. Dupré ran to him, and helped him on his feet.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the policeman, rubbing his head in his bewilderment.

"How was it done?"

"Oh, don't ask me. All at once there was a clap of thunder, and the next thing I was on my face in the street."

"Is your comrade inside?"

"Yes; he and M. Sonne and two customers."

"And the *garçon*, wasn't he there?" cried Dupré, with a note of disappointment in his voice.

The policeman didn't notice the disappointed tone, but answered—

"Oh, the *garçon*, of course."

"Ah," said Dupré, in a satisfied voice, "let us go in, and help them." Now the people had begun to gather in crowds, but kept at some distance from the café. "Dynamite! dynamite!" they said, in awed voices among themselves.

A detachment of police came mysteriously from somewhere. They drove the crowd still further back.

"What is this man doing here?" asked the Chief.

The policeman answered, "He's a friend of ours; he lives in the house."

"Oh," said the Chief.

"I was going in," said Dupré, "to find my friend, the officer, on duty in the café."

"Very well, come with us."

They found the policeman insensible under the *débris*, with a leg and both arms broken. Dupré helped to carry him out to the ambulance. M. Sonne was breathing when they found him, but died on the way to the hospital. The *garçon* had been blown to pieces.

The Chief thanked Dupré for his assistance.

They arrested many persons, but never discovered who blew up the Café Vernon, although it was surmised that some miscreant had left a bag containing an infernal machine with either the waiter or the proprietor.

AN ELECTRICAL SLIP.

Public opinion had been triumphantly vindicated. The insanity plea had broken down, and Albert Prior was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and might the Lord have mercy on his soul. Everybody agreed that it was a righteous verdict, but now that he was sentenced they added, "Poor fellow!"

Albert Prior was a young man who had had more of his own way than was good for him. His own family—father, mother, brother, and sisters—had given way to him so much, that he appeared to think the world at large should do the same. The world differed with him. Unfortunately, the first to oppose his violent will was a woman—a girl almost. She would have nothing to do with him, and told him so. He stormed, of course, but did not look upon her opposition as serious. No girl in her senses could continue to refuse a young man with his prospects in life. But when he heard that she had become engaged to young Bowen, the telegraph operator, Prior's rage passed all bounds. He determined to frighten Bowen out of the place, and called at the telegraph office for that laudable purpose; but Bowen was the night operator, and was absent. The day man, with a smile, not knowing what he did, said Bowen would likely be found at the Parker Place, where Miss Johnson lived with her aunt, her parents being dead.

Prior ground his teeth and departed. He found Miss Johnson at home, but alone. There was a stormy scene, ending with the tragedy. He fired four times at her, keeping the other two bullets for himself. But he was a coward and a cur at heart, and when it came to the point of putting the two bullets in himself he quailed, and thought it best to escape. Then electricity did him its first dis-service. It sent his description far and wide, capturing him twenty-five miles from his home. He was taken back to the county town where he lived, and lodged in gaol.

Public opinion, ever right and all-powerful, now asserted itself. The outward and visible sign of its action was an ominous gathering of dark-browed citizens outside the gaol. There were determined mutterings among the crowd rather than

outspoken anger, but the mob was the more dangerous on that account. One man in its midst thrust his closed hand towards the sky, and from his fist dangled a rope. A cry like the growling of a pack of wolves went up as the mob saw the rope, and they clamoured at the gates of the gaol. "Lynch him! Gaoler, give up the keys!" was the cry.

The agitated sheriff knew his duty, but he hesitated to perform it. Technically, this was a mob—a mob of outlaws; but in reality it was composed of his fellow-townsmen, his neighbours, his friends—justly indignant at the commission of an atrocious crime. He might order them to be fired upon, and the order perhaps would be obeyed. One, two, a dozen might be killed, and technically again they would have deserved their fate; yet all that perfectly legal slaughter would be—for what? To save, for a time only, the worthless life of a wretch who rightly merited any doom the future might have in store for him. So the sheriff wrung his hands, bewailed the fact that such a crisis should have arisen during his term of office, and did nothing; while the clamours of the mob grew so loud that the trembling prisoner in his cell heard it, and broke out into a cold sweat when he quickly realised what it meant. He was to have a dose of justice in the raw.

"What shall I do?" asked the gaoler. "Give up the keys?"

"I don't know what to do," cried the sheriff, despairingly. "Would there be any use in speaking to them, do you think?"

"Not the slightest."

"I ought to call on them to disperse, and if they refused I suppose I should have them fired on."

"That is the law," answered the gaoler, grimly.

"What would you do if you were in my place?" appealed the sheriff. It was evident the stern Roman Father was not elected by popular vote in *that* county.

"Me?" said the gaoler. "Oh, I'd give 'em the keys, and let 'em hang him. It'll save you the trouble. If you have 'em fired on, you're sure to kill the very men who are at this moment urging 'em to go home. There's always an innocent man in a mob, and he's the one to get hurt every time."

"Well then, Perkins, you give them the keys; but for Heaven's sake don't say I

told you. They'll be sorry for this to-morrow. You know I'm elected, but you're appointed, so you don't need to mind what people say."

"That's all right," said the gaoler, "I'll stand the brunt."

But the keys were not given up. The clamour had ceased. A young man with pale face and red eyes stood on the top of the stone wall that surrounded the gaol. He held up his hand and there was instant silence. They all recognised him as Bowen, the night operator, to whom *she* had been engaged.

"Gentlemen," he cried—and his clear voice reached the outskirts of the crowd —"don't do it. Don't put an everlasting stain on the fair name of our town. No one has ever been lynched in this county and none in this State, so far as I know. Don't let us begin it. If I thought the miserable scoundrel inside would escape—if I thought his money would buy him off—I'd be the man to lead you to batter down those doors and hang him on the nearest tree—and you know it." There were cheers at this. "But he won't escape. His money can't buy him off. He will be hanged by the law. Don't think it's mercy I'm preaching; it's vengeance!" Bowen shook his clenched fist at the gaol. "That wretch there has been in hell ever since he heard your shouts. He'll be in hell, for he's a dastard, until the time his trembling legs carry him to the scaffold. I want him to *stay* in this hell till he drops through into the other, if there is one. I want him to suffer some of the misery he has caused. Lynching is over in a moment. I want that murderer to die by the slow merciless cruelty of the law."

Even the worst in the crowd shuddered as they heard these words and realised as they looked at Bowen's face, almost inhuman in its rage, that his thirst for revenge made their own seem almost innocent. The speech broke up the crowd. The man with the rope threw it over into the gaol-yard, shouting to the sheriff, "Take care of it, old man, you'll need it."

The crowd dispersed, and the sheriff, overtaking Bowen, brought his hand down affectionately on his shoulder.

"Bowen, my boy," he said, "you're a brick. I'm everlastingly obliged to you. You got me out of an awful hole. If you ever get into a tight place, Bowen, come to me, and if money or influence will help you, you can have all I've got of either."

"Thanks," said Bowen, shortly. He was not in a mood for congratulations.

And so it came about, just as Bowen knew it would, that all the money and influence of the Prior family could not help the murderer, and he was sentenced to be hanged on September 21, at 6 A.M. And thus public opinion was satisfied.

But the moment the sentence was announced, and the fate of the young man settled, a curious change began to be noticed in public opinion. It seemed to have veered round. There was much sympathy for the family of course. Then there came to be much sympathy for the criminal himself. People quoted the phrase about the worst use a man can be put to. Ladies sent flowers to the condemned man's cell. After all, hanging him, poor fellow, would not bring Miss Johnson back to life. However, few spoke of Miss Johnson, she was forgotten by all but one man, who ground his teeth when he realised the instability of public opinion.

Petitions were got up, headed by the local clergy. Women begged for signatures, and got them. Every man and woman signed them. All except one; and even he was urged to sign by a tearful lady, who asked him to remember that vengeance was the Lord's.

"But the Lord has his instruments," said Bowen, grimly; "and I swear to you, madam, that if you succeed in getting that murderer reprieved, I will be the instrument of the Lord's vengeance."

"Oh, don't say that," pleaded the lady. "Your signature would have *such* an effect. You were noble once and saved him from lynching; be noble again and save him from the gallows."

"I shall certainly not sign. It is, if you will pardon me, an insult to ask me. If you reprieve him you will make a murderer of me, for I will kill him when he comes out, if it is twenty years from now. You talk of lynching; it is such work as you are doing that makes lynching possible. The people seem all with you now, more shame to them, but the next murder that is committed will be followed by a lynching just because you are successful to-day."

The lady left Bowen with a sigh, depressed because of the depravity of human nature; as indeed she had every right to be.

The Prior family was a rich and influential one. The person who is alive has many to help; the one in the grave has few to cry for justice. Petitions calling for mercy poured in on the governor from all parts of the State. The good man, whose eye was entirely on his own re- election, did not know what to do. If any

one could have shown him mathematically that this action or the other would gain or lose him exactly so many votes, his course would have been clear, but his own advisers were uncertain about the matter. A mistake in a little thing like this might easily lose him the election. Sometimes it was rumoured that the governor was going to commute the sentence to imprisonment for life; then the rumour was contradicted.

People claimed, apparently with justice, that surely imprisonment for life was a sufficient punishment for a young man; but every one knew in his own heart that the commutation was only the beginning of the fight, and that a future governor would have sufficient pressure brought to bear upon him to let the young man go.

Up to September 20 the governor made no sign. When Bowen went to his duties on the night of the 20th he met the sheriff.

"Has any reprieve arrived yet?" asked Bowen. The sheriff shook his head sadly. He had never yet hanged a man, and did not wish to begin.

"No," said the sheriff. "And from what I heard this afternoon none is likely to arrive. The governor has made up his mind at last that the law must take its course."

"I'm glad of that," said Bowen.

"Well, I'm not."

After nine o'clock messages almost ceased coming in, and Bowen sat reading the evening paper. Suddenly there came a call for the office, and the operator answered. As the message came over the wire, Bowen wrote it down mechanically from the clicking instrument, not understanding its purport; but when he read it, he jumped to his feet, with an oath. He looked wildly around the room, then realised with a sigh of relief that he was alone, except for the messenger boy who sat dozing in a corner, with his cap over his eyes. He took up the telegram again, and read it with set teeth.

"*Sheriff of Brenting County, Brentingville*.

"Do not proceed further with execution of Prior. Sentence commuted. Documents sent off by to-night's mail registered. Answer that you understand

this message.

"JOHN DAY, *Governor*."

[Illustration: "DO NOT PROCEED FURTHER WITH EXECUTION"]

Bowen walked up and down the room with knitted brow. He was in no doubt as to what he would do, but he wanted to think over it. The telegraph instrument called to him and he turned to it, giving the answering click. The message was to himself from the operator at the capital, and it told him he was to forward the sheriff's telegram without delay, and report to the office at the capital—a man's life depended on it, the message concluded. Bowen answered that the telegram to the sheriff would be immediately sent.

Taking another telegraph blank, he wrote:—

"*Sheriff of Brenting County, Brentingville*.

"Proceed with execution of Prior. No reprieve will be sent. Reply if you understand this message.

"JOHN DAY, *Governor*."

It is a pity it cannot be written that Bowen felt some compunction at what he was doing. We like to think that, when a man deliberately commits a crime, he should hesitate and pay enough deference to the proprieties as to feel at least a temporary regret, even if he goes on with his crime afterward. Bowen's thoughts were upon the dead girl, not on the living man. He roused the dozing telegraph messenger.

"Here," he said, "take this to the gaol and find the sheriff. If he is not there, go to his residence. If he is asleep, wake him up. Tell him this wants an answer. Give him a blank, and when he has filled it up, bring it to me; give the message to no one else, mind."

The boy said "Yes, sir," and departed into the night. He returned so quickly that Bowen knew without asking that he had found the sleepless sheriff at the gaol. The message to the governor, written in a trembling hand by the sheriff, was: "I understand that the execution is to take place. If you should change your mind, for God's sake telegraph as soon as possible. I shall delay execution until last

moment allowed by law."

Bowen did not send that message, but another. He laughed—and then checked himself in alarm, for his laugh sounded strange. "I wonder if I am quite sane," he said to himself. "I doubt it."

The night wore slowly on. A man representing a Press association came in after twelve and sent a long dispatch. Bowen telegraphed it, taking the chances that the receiver would not communicate with the sender of the reprieve at the capital. He knew how mechanically news of the greatest importance was taken off the wire by men who have automatically been doing that for years. Anyhow all the copper and zinc in the world could not get a message into Brentingville, except through him, until the day operator came on, and then it would be too late.

The newspaper man, lingering, asked if there would be only one telegrapher on hand after the execution.

"I shall have a lot of stuff to send over and I want it rushed. Some of the papers may get out specials. I would have brought an operator with me but we thought there was going to be a reprieve—although the sheriff didn't seem to think so," he added.

"The day operator will be here at six, I will return as soon as I have had a cup of coffee, and we'll handle all you can write," answered Bowen, without looking up from his instrument.

"Thanks. Grim business, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I thought the governor would cave; didn't you?"

"I didn't know."

"He's a shrewd old villain. He'd have lost next election if he'd reprieved this man. People don't want to see lynching introduced, and a weak-kneed governor is Judge Lynch's friend. Well, good-night, see you in the morning."

"Good-night," said Bowen.

Daylight gradually dimmed the lamps in the telegraph room, and Bowen started and caught his breath as the church bell began to toll.

It was ten minutes after six when Bowen's partner, the day man, came in.

"Well, they've hanged him," he said.

Bowen was fumbling among some papers on his table. He folded two of them and put them in his inside pocket. Then he spoke:

"There will be a newspaper man here in a few moments with a good deal of copy to telegraph. Rush it off as fast as you can and I'll be back to help before you are tired."

As Bowen walked towards the gaol he met the scattered group of those who had been privileged to see the execution. They were discussing capital punishment, and some were yawningly complaining about the unearthly hour chosen for the function they had just beheld. Between the outside gate and the gaol door Bowen met the sheriff, who was looking ghastly and sallow in the fresh morning light.

"I have come to give myself up," said Bowen, before the official could greet him.

"To give yourself up? What for?"

"For murder, I suppose."

"This is no time for joking, young man," said the sheriff, severely.

"Do I look like a humourist? Read that."

First incredulity, then horror, overspread the haggard face of the sheriff as he read and re-read the dispatch. He staggered back against the wall, putting up his arm to keep himself from falling.

"Bowen," he gasped: "Do you—do you mean to—to tell me—that this message came for me last night?"

"I do."

"And you—you suppressed it?"

"I did—and sent you a false one."

"And I have hanged—a reprieved man?"

"You have hanged a murderer—yes."

"My God! My God!" cried the sheriff. He turned his face on his arm against the wall and wept. His nerves were gone. He had been up all night and had never hanged a man before.

Bowen stood there until the spasm was over. The sheriff turned indignantly to him, trying to hide the feeling of shame he felt at giving way, in anger at the witness of it.

"And you come to me, you villain, because I said I would help you if you ever got into a tight place?"

"Damn your tight place," cried the young man, "I come to you to give myself up. I stand by what I do. I don't squeal. There will be no petitions got up for *me*. What are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know, Bowen, I don't know," faltered the official, on the point of breaking down again. He did not wish to have to hang another man, and a friend at that. "I'll have to see the governor. I'll leave by the first train. I don't suppose you'll try to escape."

"I'll be here when you want me."

So Bowen went back to help the day operator, and the sheriff left by the first train for the capital.

Now a strange thing happened. For the first time within human recollection the newspapers were unanimous in commending the conduct of the head of the State, the organs of the governor's own party lavishly praising him; the opposition sheets grudgingly admitting that he had more backbone than they had given him credit for. Public opinion, like the cat of the simile, had jumped, and that unmistakably.

"In the name of all that's wonderful, sheriff," said the bewildered governor, "who signed all those petitions? If the papers wanted the man hanged, why, in the fiend's name, did they not say so before, and save me all this worry? Now how many know of this suppressed dispatch?"

"Well, there's you and your subordinates here and——"

"*We'll* say nothing about it."

"And then there is me and Bowen in Brentingville. That's all."

"Well, Bowen will keep quiet for his own sake, and you won't mention it."

"Certainly not."

"Then let's *all* keep quiet. The thing's safe if some of those newspaper fellows don't get after it. It's not on record in the books, and I'll burn all the documents."

And thus it was. Public opinion was once more vindicated. The governor was triumphantly re-elected as a man with some stamina about him.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE DEAD.

It is a bad thing for a man to die with an unsatisfied thirst for revenge parching his soul. David Allen died, cursing Bernard Heaton and lawyer Grey; hating the lawyer who had won the case even more than the man who was to gain by the winning. Yet if cursing were to be done, David should rather have cursed his own stubbornness and stupidity.

To go back for some years, this is what had happened. Squire Heaton's only son went wrong. The Squire raged, as was natural. He was one of a long line of hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-swearing squires, and it was maddening to think that his only son should deliberately take to books and cold water, when there was manly sport on the country side and old wine in the cellar. Yet before now such blows have descended upon deserving men, and they have to be borne as best they may. Squire Heaton bore it badly, and when his son went off on a government scientific expedition around the world the Squire drank harder, and swore harder than ever, but never mentioned the boy's name.

Two years after, young Heaton returned, but the doors of the Hall were closed against him. He had no mother to plead for him, although it was not likely that would have made any difference, for the Squire was not a man to be appealed to and swayed this way or that. He took his hedges, his drinks, and his course in life straight. The young man went to India, where he was drowned. As there is no mystery in this matter, it may as well be stated here that young Heaton ultimately returned to England, as drowned men have ever been in the habit of doing, when their return will mightily inconvenience innocent persons who have taken their places. It is a disputed question whether the sudden disappearance of a man, or his reappearance after a lapse of years, is the more annoying.

If the old Squire felt remorse at the supposed death of his only son he did not show it. The hatred which had been directed against his unnatural offspring re-doubled itself and was bestowed on his nephew David Allen, who was now the

legal heir to the estate and its income. Allen was the impecunious son of the Squire's sister who had married badly. It is hard to starve when one is heir to a fine property, but that is what David did, and it soured him. The Jews would not lend on the security—the son might return—so David Allen waited for a dead man's shoes, impoverished and embittered.

At last the shoes were ready for him to step into. The old Squire died as a gentleman should, of apoplexy, in his armchair, with a decanter at his elbow. David Allen entered into his belated inheritance, and his first act was to discharge every servant, male and female, about the place and engage others who owed their situations to him alone. Then were the Jews sorry they had not trusted him.

[Illustration: HIS FIRST ACT WAS TO DISCHARGE EVERY SERVANT]

He was now rich but broken in health, with bent shoulders, without a friend on the earth. He was a man suspicious of all the world, and he had a furtive look over his shoulder as if he expected Fate to deal him a sudden blow—as indeed it did.

It was a beautiful June day, when there passed the porter's lodge and walked up the avenue to the main entrance of the Hall a man whose face was bronzed by a torrid sun. He requested speech with the master and was asked into a room to wait.

At length David Allen shuffled in, with his bent shoulders, glaring at the intruder from under his bushy eyebrows. The stranger rose as he entered and extended his hand.

"You don't know me, of course. I believe we have never met before. I am your cousin."

Allen ignored the outstretched hand.

"I have no cousin," he said.

"I am Bernard Heaton, the son of your uncle."

"Bernard Heaton is dead."

"I beg your pardon, he is not. I ought to know, for I tell you I am he."

"You lie!"

Heaton, who had been standing since his cousin's entrance, now sat down again, Allen remaining on his feet.

"Look here," said the new-comer. "Civility costs nothing and——"

"I cannot be civil to an impostor."

"Quite so. It *is* difficult. Still, if I am an impostor, civility can do no harm, while if it should turn out that I am not an impostor, then your present tone may make after arrangements all the harder upon you. Now will you oblige me by sitting down? I dislike, while sitting myself, talking to a standing man."

"Will you oblige me by stating what you want before I order my servants to turn you out?"

"I see you are going to be hard on yourself. I will endeavour to keep my temper, and if I succeed it will be a triumph for a member of our family. I am to state what I want? I will. I want as my own the three rooms on the first floor of the south wing—the rooms communicating with each other. You perceive I at least know the house. I want my meals served there, and I wish to be undisturbed at all hours. Next I desire that you settle upon me say five hundred a year—or six hundred —out of the revenues of the estate. I am engaged in scientific research of a peculiar kind. I can make money, of course, but I wish my mind left entirely free from financial worry. I shall not interfere with your enjoyment of the estate in the least."

"I'll wager you will not. So you think I am fool enough to harbour and feed the first idle vagabond that comes along and claims to be my dead cousin. Go to the courts with your story and be imprisoned as similar perjurers have been."

"Of course I don't expect you to take my word for it. If you were any judge of human nature you would see I am not a vagabond. Still that's neither here nor there. Choose three of your own friends. I will lay my proofs before them and abide by their decision. Come, nothing could be fairer than that, now could it?"

"Go to the courts, I tell you."

"Oh, certainly. But only as a last resort. No wise man goes to law if there is another course open. But what is the use of taking such an absurd position? You *know* I'm your cousin. I'll take you blindfold into every room in the place."

"Any discharged servant could do that. I have had enough of you. I am not a man to be black-mailed. Will you leave the house yourself, or shall I call the servants to put you out?"

"I should be sorry to trouble you," said Heaton, rising. "That is your last word, I take it?"

"Absolutely."

"Then good-bye. We shall meet at Philippi."

Allen watched him disappear down the avenue, and it dimly occurred to him that he had not acted diplomatically.

Heaton went directly to lawyer Grey, and laid the case before him. He told the lawyer what his modest demands were, and gave instructions that if, at any time before the suit came off, his cousin would compromise, an arrangement avoiding publicity should be arrived at.

"Excuse me for saying that looks like weakness," remarked the lawyer.

"I know it does," answered Heaton. "But my case is so strong that I can afford to have it appear weak."

The lawyer shook his head. He knew how uncertain the law was. But he soon discovered that no compromise was possible.

The case came to trial, and the verdict was entirely in favour of
Bernard Heaton.

The pallor of death spread over the sallow face of David Allen, as he realised that he was once again a man without a penny or a foot of land. He left the court with bowed head, speaking no word to those who had defended him. Heaton hurried after him, overtaking him on the pavement.

"I knew this had to be the result," he said to the defeated man. "No other

outcome was possible. I have no desire to cast you penniless into the street. What you refused to me I shall be glad to offer you. I will make the annuity a thousand pounds."

Allen, trembling, darted one look of malignant hate at his cousin.

"You successful scoundrel!" he cried. "You and your villainous confederate Grey. I tell you——"

The blood rushed to his mouth; he fell upon the pavement and died. One and the same day had robbed him of his land and his life.

Bernard Heaton deeply regretted the tragic issue, but went on with his researches at the Hall, keeping much to himself. Lawyer Grey, who had won renown by his conduct of the celebrated case, was almost his only friend. To him Heaton partially disclosed his hopes, told what he had learned during those years he had been lost to the world in India, and claimed that if he succeeded in combining the occultism of the East with the science of the West, he would make for himself a name of imperishable renown.

The lawyer, a practical man of the world, tried to persuade Heaton to abandon his particular line of research, but without success.

"No good can come of it," said Grey. "India has spoiled you. Men who dabble too much in that sort of thing go mad. The brain is a delicate instrument. Do not trifle with it."

"Nevertheless," persisted Heaton, "the great discoveries of the twentieth century are going to be in that line, just as the great discoveries of the nineteenth century have been in the direction of electricity."

"The cases are not parallel. Electricity is a tangible substance."

"Is it? Then tell me what it is composed of? We all know how it is generated, and we know partly what it will do, but what *is* it?"

"I shall have to charge you six-and-eightpence for answering that question," the lawyer had said with a laugh. "At any rate there is a good deal to be discovered about electricity yet. Turn your attention to that and leave this Indian nonsense alone."

Yet, astonishing as it may seem, Bernard Heaton, to his undoing, succeeded, after many futile attempts, several times narrowly escaping death. Inventors and discoverers have to risk their lives as often as soldiers, with less chance of worldly glory.

First his invisible excursions were confined to the house and his own grounds, then he went further afield, and to his intense astonishment one day he met the spirit of the man who hated him.

"Ah," said David Allen, "you did not live long to enjoy your ill-gotten gains."

"You are as wrong in this sphere of existence as you were in the other.
I am not dead."

"Then why are you here and in this shape?"

"I suppose there is no harm in telling *you*. What I wanted to discover, at the time you would not give me a hearing, was how to separate the spirit from its servant, the body—that is, temporarily and not finally. My body is at this moment lying apparently asleep in a locked room in my house—one of the rooms I begged from you. In an hour or two I shall return and take possession of it."

"And how do you take possession of it and quit it?"

Heaton, pleased to notice the absence of that rancour which had formerly been Allen's most prominent characteristic, and feeling that any information given to a disembodied spirit was safe as far as the world was concerned, launched out on the subject that possessed his whole mind.

"It is very interesting," said Allen, when he had finished.

And so they parted.

David Allen at once proceeded to the Hall, which he had not seen since the day he left it to attend the trial. He passed quickly through the familiar apartments until he entered the locked room on the first floor of the south wing. There on the bed lay the body of Heaton, most of the colour gone from the face, but breathing regularly, if almost imperceptibly, like a mechanical wax-figure.

If a watcher had been in the room, he would have seen the colour slowly return

to the face and the sleeper gradually awaken, at last rising from the bed.

Allen, in the body of Heaton, at first felt very uncomfortable, as a man does who puts on an ill-fitting suit of clothes. The limitations caused by the wearing of a body also discommoded him. He looked carefully around the room. It was plainly furnished. A desk in the corner he found contained the MS. of a book prepared for the printer, all executed with the neat accuracy of a scientific man. Above the desk, pasted against the wall, was a sheet of paper headed:

"What to do if I am found here apparently dead." Underneath were plainly written instructions. It was evident that Heaton had taken no one into his confidence.

It is well if you go in for revenge to make it as complete as possible. Allen gathered up the MS., placed it in the grate, and set a match to it. Thus he at once destroyed his enemy's chances of posthumous renown, and also removed evidence that might, in certain contingencies, prove Heaton's insanity.

Unlocking the door, he proceeded down the stairs, where he met a servant who told him luncheon was ready. He noticed that the servant was one whom he had discharged, so he came to the conclusion that Heaton had taken back all the old retainers who had applied to him when the result of the trial became public. Before lunch was over he saw that some of his own servants were also there still.

"Send the gamekeeper to me," said Allen to the servant.

Brown came in, who had been on the estate for twenty years continuously, with the exception of the few months after Allen had packed him off.

"What pistols have I, Brown?"

"Well, sir, there's the old Squire's duelling pistols, rather out of date, sir; then your own pair and that American revolver."

"Is the revolver in working order?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Then bring it to me and some cartridges."

When Brown returned with the revolver his master took it and examined it.

"Be careful, sir," said Brown, anxiously. "You know it's a self-cocker, sir."

"A what?"

"A self-cocking revolver, sir"—trying to repress his astonishment at the question his master asked about a weapon with which he should have been familiar.

"Show me what you mean," said Allen, handing back the revolver.

Brown explained that the mere pulling of the trigger fired the weapon.

"Now shoot at the end window—never mind the glass. Don't stand gaping at me, do as I tell you."

Brown fired the revolver, and a diamond pane snapped out of the window.

"How many times will that shoot without reloading?"

"Seven times, sir."

"Very good. Put in a cartridge for the one you fired and leave the revolver with me. Find out when there is a train to town, and let me know."

It will be remembered that the dining-room incident was used at the trial, but without effect, as going to show that Bernard Heaton was insane. Brown also testified that there was something queer about his master that day.

David Allen found all the money he needed in the pockets of Bernard Heaton. He caught his train, and took a cab from the station directly to the law offices of Messrs. Grey, Leason and Grey, anxious to catch the lawyer before he left for the day.

The clerk sent up word that Mr. Heaton wished to see the senior Mr. Grey for a few moments. Allen was asked to walk up.

"You know the way, sir," said the clerk.

Allen hesitated.

"Announce me, if you please."

The clerk, being well trained, showed no surprise, but led the visitor to Mr. Grey's door.

"How are you, Heaton?" said the lawyer, cordially. "Take a chair. Where have you been keeping yourself this long time? How are the Indian experiments coming on?"

"Admirably, admirably," answered Allen.

At the sound of his voice the lawyer looked up quickly, then apparently reassured he said—

"You're not looking quite the same. Been keeping yourself too much indoors, I imagine. You ought to quit research and do some shooting this autumn."

"I intend to, and I hope then to have your company."

"I shall be pleased to run down, although I am no great hand at a gun."

"I want to speak with you a few moments in private. Would you mind locking the door so that we may not be interrupted?"

"We are quite safe from interruption here," said the lawyer, as he turned the key in the lock; then resuming his seat he added, "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It is rather serious. Do you mind my sitting here?" asked Allen, as he drew up his chair so that he was between Grey and the door, with the table separating them. The lawyer was watching him with anxious face, but without, as yet, serious apprehension.

"Now," said Allen, "will you answer me a simple question? To whom are you talking?"

"To whom—?" The lawyer in his amazement could get no further.

"Yes. To whom are you talking? Name him."

"Heaton, what is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Well, you have mentioned a name, but, being a villain and a lawyer, you cannot give a direct answer to a very simple question. You think you are talking to that poor fool Bernard Heaton. It is true that the body you are staring at is Heaton's body, but the man you are talking to is—David Allen—the man you swindled and then murdered. Sit down. If you move you are a dead man. Don't try to edge to the door. There are seven deaths in this revolver and the whole seven can be let loose in less than that many seconds, for this is a self-cocking instrument. Now it will take you at least ten seconds to get to the door, so remain exactly where you are. That advice will strike you as wise, even if, as you think, you have to do with a madman. You asked me a minute ago how the Indian experiments were coming on, and I answered admirably. Bernard Heaton left his body this morning, and I, David Allen, am now in possession of it. Do you understand? I admit it is a little difficult for the legal mind to grasp such a situation."

"Ah, not at all," said Grey, airily. "I comprehend it perfectly. The man I see before me is the spirit, life, soul, whatever you like to call it—of David Allen in the body of my friend Bernard Heaton. The— ah—essence of my friend is at this moment fruitlessly searching for his missing body. Perhaps he is in this room now, not knowing how to get out a spiritual writ of ejectment against you."

"You show more quickness than I expected of you," said Allen.

"Thanks," rejoined Grey, although he said to himself, "Heaton has gone mad! stark staring mad, as I expected he would. He is armed. The situation is becoming dangerous. I must humour him."

"Thanks. And now may I ask what you propose to do? You have not come here for legal advice. You never, unluckily for me, were a client of mine."

"No. I did not come either to give or take advice. I am here, alone with you—you gave orders that we were not to be disturbed, remember— for the sole purpose of revenging myself on you and on Heaton. Now listen, for the scheme will commend itself to your ingenious mind. I shall murder you in this room. I shall then give myself up. I shall vacate this body in Newgate prison and your friend may then resume his tenancy or not as he chooses. He may allow the unoccupied body to die in the cell or he may take possession of it and be hanged for murder. Do you appreciate the completeness of my vengeance on you both? Do you think your friend will care to put on his body again?"

[Illustration: "WHEN YOU PRESS THE IVORY BUTTON, I FIRE"]

"It is a nice question," said the lawyer, as he edged his chair imperceptibly along and tried to grope behind himself, unperceived by his visitor, for the electric button, placed against the wall. "It is a nice question, and I would like to have time to consider it in all its bearings before I gave an answer."

"You shall have all the time you care to allow yourself. I am in no hurry, and I wish you to realise your situation as completely as possible. Allow me to say that the electric button is a little to the left and slightly above where you are feeling for it. I merely mention this because I must add, in fairness to you, that the moment you touch it, time ends as far as you are concerned. When you press the ivory button, I fire."

The lawyer rested his arms on the table before him, and for the first time a hunted look of alarm came into his eyes, which died out of them when, after a moment or two of intense fear, he regained possession of himself.

"I would like to ask you a question or two," he said at last.

"As many as you choose. I am in no hurry, as I said before."

"I am thankful for your reiteration of that. The first question is then: has a temporary residence in another sphere interfered in any way with your reasoning powers?"

"I think not."

"Ah, I had hoped that your appreciation of logic might have improved during your—well, let us say absence; you were not very logical—not very amenable to reason, formerly."

"I know you thought so."

"I did; so did your own legal adviser, by the way. Well, now let me ask why you are so bitter against me? Why not murder the judge who charged against you, or the jury that unanimously gave a verdict in our favour? I was merely an instrument, as were they."

"It was your devilish trickiness that won the case."

"That statement is flattering but untrue. The case was its own best advocate. But you haven't answered the question. Why not murder judge and jury?"

"I would gladly do so if I had them in my power. You see, I am perfectly logical."

"Quite, quite," said the lawyer. "I am encouraged to proceed. Now of what did my devilish trickiness rob you?"

"Of my property, and then of my life."

"I deny both allegations, but will for the sake of the argument admit them for the moment. First, as to your property. It was a possession that might at any moment be jeopardised by the return of Bernard Heaton."

"By the *real* Bernard Heaton—yes."

"Very well then. As you are now repossessed of the property, and as you have the outward semblance of Heaton, your rights cannot be questioned. As far as property is concerned you are now in an unassailable position where formerly you were in an assailable one. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"We come (second) to the question of life. You then occupied a body frail, bent, and diseased, a body which, as events showed, gave way under exceptional excitement. You are now in a body strong and healthy, with apparently a long life before it. You admit the truth of all I have said on these two points?"

"I quite admit it."

"Then to sum up, you are now in a better position—infinitely—both as regards life and property, than the one from which my malignity— ingenuity I think was your word—ah, yes—trickiness—thanks—removed you. Now why cut your career short? Why murder *me?* Why not live out your life, under better conditions, in luxury and health, and thus be completely revenged on Bernard Heaton? If you are logical, now is the time to show it."

Allen rose slowly, holding the pistol in his right hand.

"You miserable scoundrel!" he cried. "You pettifogging lawyer—tricky to the last! How gladly you would throw over your friend to prolong your own wretched existence! Do you think you are now talking to a biased judge and a susceptible, brainless jury? Revenged on Heaton? I *am* revenged on him already. But part of my vengeance involves your death. Are you ready for it?"

Allen pointed the revolver at Grey, who had now also risen, his face ashen. He kept his eyes fastened on the man he believed to be mad. His hand crept along the wall. There was intense silence between them. Allen did not fire. Slowly the lawyer's hand moved towards the electric button. At last he felt the ebony rim and his fingers quickly covered it. In the stillness, the vibrating ring of an electric bell somewhere below was audible. Then the sharp crack of the revolver suddenly split the silence. The lawyer dropped on one knee, holding his arm in the air as if to ward off attack. Again the revolver rang out, and Grey plunged forward on his face. The other five shots struck a lifeless body.

A stratum of blue smoke hung breast high in the room as if it were the departing soul of the man who lay motionless on the floor. Outside were excited voices, and some one flung himself ineffectually against the stout locked door.

Allen crossed the room and, turning the key, flung open the door. "I have murdered your master," he said, handing the revolver butt forward to the nearest man. "I give myself up. Go and get an officer."

OVER THE STELVIO PASS.

There is no question about it, Tina Lenz was a flirt, as she had a perfect right to be, living as she did on the romantic shores of Como, celebrated in song, story, and drama as the lover's blue lake. Tina had many admirers, and it was just like her perversity to favor the one to whom her father most objected. Pietro, as the father truly said, was a beggarly Italian driver, glad of the few francs he got from the travellers he took over the humble Maloga to the Engadine, or over the elevated Stelvio to the Tyrol, the lowest and the highest passes in Europe. It was a sad blow to the hopes as well as the family pride of old Lenz when Tina defiantly announced her preference for the driver of the Zweispanner. Old Lenz came of a long and distinguished line of Swiss hotel-keepers, noted for the success with which they squeezed the last attainable centime from the reluctant traveller. It was bad enough that he had no son to inherit his justly celebrated hotel (*pension* rates for a stay of not less than eight days), but he hoped for a son-in-law, preferably of Swiss extraction, to whom he might, in his old age, hand over the lucrative profession of deferentially skinning the wealthy Englishman. And now Tina had deliberately chosen a reckless, unstable Italian who would, in a short time, scatter to the winds the careful accumulation of years.

"Pietro, the scoundrel, will not have one piastra of my money," cried the old man wrathfully, dropping into Italian as he was speaking about a native of Italy.

"No, I shall see that he doesn't," said the girl. "I shall hold the purse, and he must earn what he spends."

"But if you marry him, you will not have any of it."

"Oh yes, I shall, papa," said Tina confidently; "you have no one else to leave it to. Besides, you are not old, and you will be reconciled to our marriage long before there is any question of leaving money."

"Don't be so sure of that," returned the hotel-keeper, much mollified, because he was old and corpulent, and red in the face.

He felt that he was no match for his daughter, and that she would likely have her own way in the long run, but he groaned when he thought of Pietro as proprietor of the prosperous *pension*. Tina insisted that she would manage the hotel on the strictest principles of her ancestors, and that she would keep Pietro lounging about the place as a picturesque ornament to attract sentimental visitors, who seemed to see some unaccountable beauty about the lake and its surroundings.

Meanwhile Landlord Lenz promptly discharged Pietro, and cursed the day and hour he had first engaged him. He informed the picturesque young man that if he caught him talking to his daughter he would promptly have him arrested for some little thefts from travellers of which he had been guilty, although the landlord had condoned them at the time of discovery, probably because he had a fellow-feeling in the matter, and saw the making of a successful hotel proprietor in the Zweispanner driver. Pietro, on his part, to make things pleasant all round, swore that on the first favourable opportunity he would run six inches of knife into the extensive corporation of the landlord, hoping in that length of steel to reach a vital spot. The ruddy face of old Lenz paled at this threat, for the Swiss are a peace-loving people, and he told his daughter sadly that she was going to bring her father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave through the medium of her lover's stiletto. This feat, however, would have been difficult to perform, as the girl flippantly pointed out to him, for the old man was as bald as the smooth round top of the Ortler; nevertheless, she spoke to her lover about it, and told him frankly that if there was any knife practice in that vicinity he need never come to see her again. So the young man with the curly black hair and the face of an angel, swallowed his resentment against his desired father-in-law, and promised to behave himself. He secured a position as driver at another hotel, for the season was brisk, and he met Tina when he could, at the bottom of the garden overlooking the placid lake, he on one side of the stone wall, she on the other.

If Landlord Lenz knew of these meetings he did not interfere; perhaps he was frightened of Pietro's stiletto, or perhaps he feared his daughter's tongue; nevertheless, the stars in their courses were fighting for the old man. Tina was naturally of a changeable disposition, and now that all opposition had vanished, she began to lose interest in Pietro. He could talk of little else than horses, and interesting as such conversation undoubtedly is, it palls upon a girl of eighteen

leaning over a stone wall in the golden evening light that hovers above Como. There are other subjects, but that is neither here nor there, as Pietro did not recognise the fact, and, unfortunately for him, there happened to come along a member of the great army of the unemployed who did.

He came that way just in the nick of time, and proud as old Lenz was of his *pension* and its situation, it was not the unrivalled prospect (as stated in the hotel advertisements) that stopped him. It was the sight of a most lovely girl leaning over the stone wall at the foot of the garden, gazing down at the lake and singing softly to herself.

"By Jove!" said young Standish, "she looks as if she were waiting for her lover." Which, indeed, was exactly what Tina was doing, and it augured ill for the missing man that she was not the least impatient at his delay.

"The missing lover is a defect in the landscape which ought to be supplied," murmured young Standish as he unslung his knapsack, which, like that of the late John Brown, was strapped upon his back. He entered the *pension* and inquired the rates. Old Lenz took one glance at the knickerbockers, and at once asked twice as much as he would have charged a native. Standish agreed to the terms with that financial recklessness characteristic of his island, and the old man regretted he had not asked a third more.

"But never mind," he said to himself as the newly arrived guest disappeared to his room, "I shall make it up on the extras."

With deep regret it must be here admitted that young Standish was an artist. Artists are met with so often in fiction that it is a matter of genuine grief to have to deal with one in a narrative of fact, but it must be remembered that artists flock as naturally to the lake of Como as stock-brokers to the Exchange, and in setting down an actual statement of occurrences in that locality the unfortunate writer finds himself confronted with artists at every turn. Standish was an artist in water-colours, but whether that is a mitigation or an aggravation of the original offense the relater knoweth not. He speedily took to painting Tina amidst various combinations of lake and mountain scenery. Tina over the garden wall as he first saw her; Tina under an arch of roses; Tina in one of the clumsy but picturesque lake boats. He did his work very well, too. Old Landlord Lenz had the utmost contempt for this occupation, as a practical man should, but he was astonished one day when a passing traveller offered an incredible sum for

one of the pictures that stood on the hall table. Standish was not to be found, but the old man, quite willing to do his guest a good turn, sold the picture. The young man, instead of being overjoyed at his luck, told the landlord, with the calm cheek of an artist, that he would overlook the matter this time, but it must not occur again. He had sold the picture, added Standish, for about one-third its real value. There was something in the quiet assurance of the youth that more than his words convinced old Lenz of the truth of his statement. Manner has much to do with getting a well-told lie believed. The inn-keeper's respect for the young man went up to the highest attainable point, and he had seen so many artists, too. But if such prices were obtained for a picture dashed off in a few hours, the hotel business wasn't in it as a money- making venture.

It must be confessed that it was a great shock to young Standish when he found that the fairy-like Tina was the daughter of the gross old stupid keeper of the inn. It would have been so nice if she had happened to be a princess, and the fact would have worked in well with the marble terrace overlooking the lake. It seemed out of keeping entirely that she should be any relation to old money-making Lenz. Of course he had no more idea of marrying the girl than he had of buying the lake of Como and draining it; still, it was such a pity that she was not a countess at least; there were so many of them in Italy too, surely one might have been spared for that *pension* when a man had to stay eight days to get the lowest rates. Nevertheless, Tina did make a pretty water-colour sketch. But a man who begins sliding down a hill such as there is around Como, never can tell exactly where he is going to bring up. He may stop halfway, or he may go head first into the lake. If it were to be set down here that within a certain space of time Standish did not care one continental objurgation whether Tina was a princess or a char-woman, the statement would simply not be believed, because we all know that Englishmen are a cold, calculating race of men, with long side whiskers and a veil round their hats when they travel.

It is serious when a young fellow sketches in water-colours a charming sylph-like girl in various entrancing attitudes; it is disastrous when she teaches him a soft flowing language like the Italian; but it is absolute destruction when he teaches her the English tongue and watches her pretty lips strive to surround words never intended for the vocal resources of a foreigner. As all these influences were brought to bear on Walter Standish, what chance did the young fellow have? Absolutely as little as has the un-roped man who misses his footing on the Matterhorn.

And Tina? Poor little girl, she was getting paid back with a vengeance for all the heart-aches she had caused—Italian, German, or Swiss variety. She fell helplessly in love with the stalwart Englishman, and realised that she had never known before what the word meant. Bitterly did she regret the sham battles of the heart that she had hitherto engaged in. Standish took it so entirely for granted that he was the first to touch her lips (in fact she admitted as much herself) that she was in daily, hourly terror lest he should learn the truth. Meanwhile Pietro unburdened his neglected soul of strange oily imprecations that might have sounded to the uneducated ear of Standish like mellifluous benedictions, notwithstanding the progress he was making in Italian under Tina's tuition. However, Pietro had one panacea for all his woes, and that he proceeded to sharpen carefully.

One evening Standish was floating dreamily through the purple haze, thinking about Tina of course, and wondering how her piquant archness and Southern beauty would strike his sober people at home. Tina was very quick and adaptable, and he had no doubt she could act to perfection any part he assigned to her, so he was in doubt whether to introduce her as a remote connexion of the reigning family of Italy, or merely as a countess in her own right. It would be quite easy to ennoble the long line of hotel-keepers by the addition of "di" or "de" or some such syllable to the family name. He must look up the right combination of letters; he knew it began with "d." Then the *pension* could become dimly "A castle on the Italian lakes, you know"; in fact, he would close up the *pension* as soon as he had the power, or change it to a palace. He knew that most of the castles in the Tyrol and many of the palaces of Italy had become boarding- houses, so why not reverse the process? He was sure that certain furnishing houses in London could do it, probably on the hire system. He knew a fashionable morning paper that was in the habit of publishing personal items at so much a line, and he thought the following would read well and be worth its cost:—

"Mr. Walter Standish, of St. John's Wood, and his wife, the Comtessa di Lenza, are spending the summer in the lady's ancestral home, the Palazzio di Lenza, on the lake of Como."

This bright vision pleased him for a moment, until he thought it would be just his luck for some acquaintance to happen along who remembered the Palazzio Lenza when it was the Pension Lenz—rates on application. He wished a landslide would carry buildings, grounds, and everything else away to some

unrecognisable spot a few hundred feet down the mountain.

Thus it was that young Standish floated along with his head in the clouds, swinging his cane in the air, when suddenly he was brought sharply down to earth again. A figure darted out from behind a tree, an instinct rather than reason caused the artist to guard himself by throwing up his left arm. He caught the knife thrust in the fleshy part of it, and the pain was like the red-hot sting of a gigantic wasp. It flashed through his brain then that the term cold steel was a misnomer. The next moment his right hand had brought down the heavy knob of his stout stick on the curly head of the Italian, and Pietro fell like a log at his feet. Standish set his teeth, and as gently as possible drew the stiletto from his arm, wiping its blade on the clothes of the prostrate man. He thought it better to soil Pietro's suit than his own, which was newer and cleaner; besides, he held, perhaps with justice, that the Italian being the aggressor should bear any disadvantages arising from the attack. Finally, feeling wet at the elbow, he put the stiletto in his pocket and hurried off to the hotel.

[Illustration: WIPING ITS BLADE ON THE CLOTHES OF THE PROSTRATE MAN]

Tina fell back against the wall with a cry at the sight of the blood. She would have fainted, but something told her that she would be well advised to keep her senses about her at that moment.

"I can't imagine why he should attack me," said Standish, as he bared his arm to be bandaged. "I never saw him before, and I have had no quarrel with any one. It could not have been robbery, for I was too near the hotel. I cannot understand it."

"Oh," began old Lenz, "it's easy enough to account for it. He——"

Tina darted one look at her father that went through him as the blade had gone through the outstretched arm. His mouth closed like a steel trap.

"Please go for Doctor Zandorf, papa," she said sweetly, and the old man went. "These Italians," she continued to Standish, "are always quarrelling. The villain mistook you for some one else in the dusk."

"Ah, that's it, very likely. If the rascal has returned to his senses, he probably regrets having waked up the wrong passenger."

When the authorities searched for Pietro they found that he had disappeared as absolutely as though Standish had knocked him through into China. When he came to himself and rubbed his head, he saw the blood on the road, and he knew his stroke had gone home somewhere. The missing knife would be evidence against him, so he thought it safer to get on the Austrian side of the fence. Thus he vanished over the Stelvio pass, and found horses to drive on the other side.

The period during which Standish loafed around that lovely garden with his arm in a sling, waited upon assiduously and tenderly by Tina, will always be one of the golden remembrances of the Englishman's life. It was too good to last for ever, and so they were married when it came to an end. The old man would still have preferred a Swiss innkeeper for a son-in-law, yet the Englishman was better than the beggarly Italian, and possibly better than the German who had occupied a place in Tina's regards before the son of sunny Italy appeared on the scene. That is one trouble in the continental hotel business; there is such a bewildering mixture of nationalities.

Standish thought it best not to go back to England at once, as he had not quite settled to his own satisfaction how the *pension* was to be eliminated from the affair and transformed into a palace. He knew a lovely and elevated castle in the Tyrol near Meran where they accepted passers-by in an unobtrusive sort of way, and there, he resolved, they would make their plans. So the old man gave them a great set-out with which to go over the pass, privately charging the driver to endeavour to get a return fare from Meran so as to, partly at least, cover the outlay. The carriage was drawn by five horses, one on each side of the pole and three in front. They rested the first night at Bormeo, and started early next day for over the pass, expecting to dine at Franzenshöhe within sight of the snowy Ortler.

It was late in the season and the weather was slightly uncertain, but they had a lovely Italian forenoon for going up the wonderful, zigzag road on the western side of the pass. At the top there was a slight sprinkling of snow, and clouds hung over the lofty Ortler group of peaks. As they got lower down a steady persistent rain set in, and they were glad to get to the shelter and warmth of the oblong stone inn at Franzenshöhe, where a good dinner awaited them. After dinner the weather cleared somewhat, but the clouds still obscured the tops of the mountains, and the roads were slippery. Standish regretted this, for he wanted to show his bride the splendid scenery of the next five miles where the road zigzags down to Trefoi, each elbow of the dizzy thoroughfare overhanging the

most awful precipices. It was a dangerous bit of road, and even with only two horses, requires a cool and courageous driver with a steady head. They were the sole guests at the inn, and it needed no practised eye to see that they were a newly married couple. The news spread abroad, and every lounger about the place watched them get into their carriage and drive away, one hind wheel of the carriage sliding on its skid, and all breaks on.

At the first turning Standish started, for the carriage went around it with dangerous speed. The whip cracked, too, like a succession of pistol shots, which was unusual going down the mountain. He said nothing to alarm his bride, but thought that the driver had taken on more wine than was good for him at the inn. At the second turn the wheel actually slid against and bumped the stone post that was the sole guard from the fearful precipice below. The sound and shock sent a cold chill up the back of Standish, for he knew the road well and there were worse places to come. His arm was around his wife, and he withdrew it gently so as not to alarm her. As he did so she looked up and shrieked. Following her glance to the front window of their closed carriage, where the back of the driver is usually to be seen, he saw pressed against the glass the distorted face of a demon. The driver was kneeling on his seat instead of sitting on it, and was peering in at them, the reins drawn over his shoulder, and his back to the horses. It seemed to Standish that the light of insanity gleamed from his eyes, but Tina saw in them the revengeful glare of the *vendetti*; the rage of the disappointed lover.

"My God! that's not our driver," cried Standish, who did not recognise the man who had once endeavoured to kill him. He sprang up and tried to open the front window, but the driver yelled out—

"Open that window if you dare, and I'll drive you over here before you get halfway down. Sit still, and I take you as far as the Weisse Knott. That's where you are going over. There you'll have a drop of a mile (*un miglio*)."

"Turn to your horses, you scoundrel," shouted Standish, "or I'll break every bone in your body!"

"The horses know the way, Signor Inglese, and all our bones are going to be broken, yours and your sweet bride's as well as mine."

The driver took the whip and fired off a fusilade of cracks overhead, beside

them, and under them. The horses dashed madly down the slope, almost sending the carriage over at the next turn. Standish looked at his wife. She had apparently fainted, but in reality had merely closed her eyes to shut out the horrible sight of Pietro's face. Standish thrust his arm out of the open window, unfastened the door, and at the risk of his neck jumped out. Tina shrieked when she opened her eyes and found herself alone. Pietro now pushed in the frame of the front window and it dropped out of sight, leaving him face to face with her, with no glass between them. "Now that your fine Inglese is gone, Tina, we are going to be married; you promised it, you know."

"You coward," she hissed; "I'd rather die his wife than live yours."

"You're plucky, little Tina, you always were. But he left you. I wouldn't have left you. I won't leave you. We'll be married at the chapel of the Three Holy Springs, a mile below the Weisse Knott; we'll fly through the air to it, Tina, and our bed will be at the foot of the Madatseh Glacier. We will go over together near where the man threw his wife down. They have marked the spot with a marble slab, but they will put a bigger one for us, Tina, for there's two of us."

Tina crouched in the corner of the carriage and watched the face of the Italian as if she were fascinated. She wanted to jump out as her husband had done, but she was afraid to move, feeling certain that if she attempted to escape Pietro would pounce down upon her. He looked like some wild beast crouching for a spring. All at once she saw something drop from the sky on the footboard of the carriage. Then she heard her husband's voice ring out—

"Here, you young fool, we've had enough of this nonsense."

The next moment Pietro fell to the road, propelled by a vigorous kick. His position lent itself to treatment of that kind. The carriage gave a bump as it passed over Pietro's leg, and then Tina thinks that she fainted in earnest, for the next thing she knew the carriage was standing still, and Standish was rubbing her hands and calling her pleasant names. She smiled wanly at him.

"How in the world did you catch up to the carriage and it going so fast?" she asked, a woman's curiosity prompting her first words.

"Oh, the villain forgot about the short cuts. As I warned him, he ought to have paid more attention to what was going on outside. I'm going back now to have a talk with him. He's lying on the road at the upper end of this slope."

Tina was instantly herself again.

"No, dearest," she said caressingly; "you mustn't go back. He probably has a knife."

"I'm not afraid."

"No, but I am, and you mustn't leave me."

"I would like to tie him up in a hard knot and take him down to civilisation bumping behind the carriage as luggage. I think he's the fellow who knifed me, and I want to find out what his game is."

Here Tina unfortunately began to faint again. She asked for wine in a far-off voice, and Standish at once forgot all about the demon driver. He mounted the box and took the reins himself. He got wine at the little cabin of the Weisse Knott, a mile or two farther down. Tina, who had revived amazingly, probably on account of the motion of the carriage, shuddered as she looked into the awful gulf and saw five tiny toy houses in the gloom nearly a mile below.

"That," said Standish, "is the chapel of the Three Holy Springs. We will go there to-night, if you like, from Trefoi."

"No, no!" cried Tina, shivering. "Let us get out of the mountains at once."

At Trefoi they found their own driver awaiting them.

"What the devil are you doing here, and how did you get here?" hotly inquired Standish.

"By the short cuts," replied the bewildered man. "Pietro, one of master's old drivers, wanted—I don't know why—to drive you as far as Trefoi. Where is he, sir?"

"I don't know," said Standish. "We saw nothing of him. He must have been pushed off the box by the madman. Here, jump up and let us get on."

Tina breathed again. That crisis was over.

They live very happily together, for Tina is a very tactful little woman.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

Prince Lotarno rose slowly to his feet, casting one malignant glance at the prisoner before him.

"You have heard," he said, "what is alleged against you. Have you anything to say in your defence?"

The captured brigand laughed.

"The time for talk is past," he cried. "This has been a fine farce of a fair trial. You need not have wasted so much time over what you call evidence. I knew my doom when I fell into your hands. I killed your brother; you will kill me. You have proven that I am a murderer and a robber; I could prove the same of you if you were bound hand and foot in my camp as I am bound in your castle. It is useless for me to tell you that I did not know he was your brother, else it would not have happened, for the small robber always respects the larger and more powerful thief. When a wolf is down, the other wolves devour him. I am down, and you will have my head cut off, or my body drawn asunder in your courtyard, whichever pleases your Excellency best. It is the fortune of war, and I do not complain. When I say that I am sorry I killed your brother, I merely mean I am sorry you were not the man who stood in his shoes when the shot was fired. You, having more men than I had, have scattered my followers and captured me. You may do with me what you please. My consolation is that the killing me will not bring to life the man who is shot, therefore conclude the farce that has dragged through so many weary hours. Pronounce my sentence. I am ready."

There was a moment's silence after the brigand had ceased speaking. Then the Prince said, in low tones, but in a voice that made itself heard in every part of the judgment-hall—

"Your sentence is that on the fifteenth of January you shall be taken from your

cell at four o'clock, conducted to the room of execution, and there beheaded."

The Prince hesitated for a moment as he concluded the sentence, and seemed about to add something more, but apparently he remembered that a report of the trial was to go before the King, whose representative was present, and he was particularly desirous that nothing should go on the records which savoured of old-time malignity; for it was well known that his Majesty had a particular aversion to the ancient forms of torture that had obtained heretofore in his kingdom. Recollecting this, the Prince sat down.

The brigand laughed again. His sentence was evidently not so gruesome as he had expected. He was a man who had lived all his life in the mountains, and he had had no means of knowing that more merciful measures had been introduced into the policy of the Government.

"I will keep the appointment," he said jauntily, "unless I have a more pressing engagement."

The brigand was led away to his cell. "I hope," said the Prince, "that you noted the defiant attitude of the prisoner."

"I have not failed to do so, your Excellency," replied the ambassador.

"I think," said the Prince, "that under the circumstances, his treatment has been most merciful."

"I am certain, your Excellency," said the ambassador, "that his Majesty will be of the same opinion. For such a miscreant, beheading is too easy a death."

The Prince was pleased to know that the opinion of the ambassador coincided so entirely with his own.

The brigand Toza was taken to a cell in the northern tower, where, by climbing on a bench, he could get a view of the profound valley at the mouth of which the castle was situated. He well knew its impregnable position, commanding as it did, the entrance to the valley. He knew also that if he succeeded in escaping from the castle he was hemmed in by mountains practically unscalable, while the mouth of the gorge was so well guarded by the castle that it was impossible to get to the outer world through that gateway. Although he knew the mountains well, he realised that, with his band scattered, many killed, and the others

fugitives, he would have a better chance of starving to death in the valley than of escaping out of it. He sat on the bench and thought over the situation. Why had the Prince been so merciful? He had expected torture, whereas he was to meet the easiest death that a man could die. He felt satisfied there was something in this that he could not understand. Perhaps they intended to starve him to death, now that the appearance of a fair trial was over. Things could be done in the dungeon of a castle that the outside world knew nothing of. His fears of starvation were speedily put to an end by the appearance of his gaoler with a better meal than he had had for some time; for during the last week he had wandered a fugitive in the mountains until captured by the Prince's men, who evidently had orders to bring him in alive. Why then were they so anxious not to kill him in a fair fight if he were now to be merely beheaded?

"What is your name?" asked Toza of his gaoler.

"I am called Paulo," was the answer.

"Do you know that I am to be beheaded on the fifteenth of the month?"

"I have heard so," answered the man.

"And do you attend me until that time?"

"I attend you while I am ordered to do so. If you talk much I may be replaced."

"That, then, is a tip for silence, good Paulo," said the brigand. "I always treat well those who serve me well; I regret, therefore, that I have no money with me, and so cannot recompense you for good service."

"That is not necessary," answered Paulo. "I receive my recompense from the steward."

"Ah, but the recompense of the steward and the recompense of a brigand chief are two very different things. Are there so many pickings in your position that you are rich, Paulo?"

"No; I am a poor man."

"Well, under certain circumstances, I could make you rich."

Paulo's eyes glistened, but he made no direct reply. Finally he said, in a frightened whisper, "I have tarried too long, I am watched. By- and-by the vigilance will be relaxed, and then we may perhaps talk of riches."

With that the gaoler took his departure. The brigand laughed softly to himself. "Evidently," he said, "Paulo is not above the reach of a bribe. We will have further talk on the subject when the watchfulness is relaxed."

And so it grew to be a question of which should trust the other. The brigand asserted that hidden in the mountains he had gold and jewels, and these he would give to Paulo if he could contrive his escape from the castle.

"Once free of the castle, I can soon make my way out of the valley," said the brigand.

"I am not so sure of that," answered Paulo. "The castle is well guarded, and when it is discovered that you have escaped, the alarm- bell will be rung, and after that not a mouse can leave the valley without the soldiers knowing it."

The brigand pondered on the situation for some time, and at last said,
"I know the mountains well."

"Yes;" said Paulo, "but you are one man, and the soldiers of the Prince are many. Perhaps," he added, "if it were made worth my while, I could show you that I know the mountains even better than you do."

"What do you mean?" asked the brigand, in an excited whisper.

"Do you know the tunnel?" inquired Paulo, with an anxious glance towards the door.

"What tunnel? I never heard of any."

"But it exists, nevertheless; a tunnel through the mountains to the world outside."

"A tunnel through the mountains? Nonsense!" cried the brigand. "I should have known of it if one existed. The work would be too great to accomplish."

"It was made long before your day, or mine either. If the castle had fallen, then those who were inside could escape through the tunnel. Few know of the

entrance; it is near the waterfall up the valley, and is covered with brushwood. What will you give me to place you at the entrance of that tunnel?"

The brigand looked at Paulo sternly for a few moments, then he answered slowly, "Everything I possess."

"And how much is that?" asked Paulo.

"It is more than you will ever earn by serving the Prince."

"Will you tell me where it is before I help you to escape from the castle and lead you to the tunnel?"

"Yes," said Toza.

"Will you tell me now?"

"No; bring me a paper to-morrow, and I will draw a plan showing you how to get it."

[Illustration: "I WILL DRAW A PLAN"]

When his gaoler appeared, the day after Toza had given the plan, the brigand asked eagerly, "Did you find the treasure?"

"I did," said Paulo quietly.

"And will you keep your word?—will you get me out of the castle?"

"I will get you out of the castle and lead you to the entrance of the tunnel, but after that you must look to yourself."

"Certainly," said Toza, "that was the bargain. Once out of this accursed valley, I can defy all the princes in Christendom. Have you a rope?"

"We shall need none," said the gaoler. "I will come for you at midnight, and take you out of the castle by the secret passage; then your escape will not be noticed until morning."

At midnight his gaoler came and led Toza through many a tortuous passage, the two men pausing now and then, holding their breaths anxiously as they came to

an open court through which a guard paced. At last they were outside of the castle at one hour past midnight.

The brigand drew a long breath of relief when he was once again out in the free air.

"Where is your tunnel?" he asked, in a somewhat distrustful whisper of his guide.

"Hush!" was the low answer. "It is only a short distance from the castle, but every inch is guarded, and we cannot go direct; we must make for the other side of the valley and come to it from the north."

"What!" cried Toza in amazement, "traverse the whole valley for a tunnel a few yards away?"

"It is the only safe plan," said Paulo. "If you wish to go by the direct way, I must leave you to your own devices."

"I am in your hands," said the brigand with a sigh. "Take me where you will, so long as you lead me to the entrance of the tunnel."

They passed down and down around the heights on which the castle stood, and crossed the purling little river by means of stepping-stones. Once Toza fell into the water, but was rescued by his guide. There was still no alarm from the castle as daylight began to break. As it grew more light they both crawled into a cave which had a low opening difficult to find, and there Paulo gave the brigand his breakfast, which he took from a little bag slung by a strap across his shoulder.

"What are we going to do for food if we are to be days between here and the tunnel?" asked Toza.

"Oh, I have arranged for that, and a quantity of food has been placed where we are most likely to want it. I will get it while you sleep."

"But if you are captured, what am I to do?" asked Toza. "Can you not tell me now how to find the tunnel, as I told you how to find the treasure?"

Paulo pondered over this for a moment, and then said, "Yes; I think it would be the safer way. You must follow the stream until you reach the place where the

torrent from the east joins it. Among the hills there is a waterfall, and halfway up the precipice on a shelf of rock there are sticks and bushes. Clear them away, and you will find the entrance to the tunnel. Go through the tunnel until you come to a door, which is bolted on this side. When you have passed through, you will see the end of your journey."

Shortly after daybreak the big bell of the castle began to toll, and before noon the soldiers were beating the bushes all around them. They were so close that the two men could hear their voices from their hiding-place, where they lay in their wet clothes, breathlessly expecting every moment to be discovered.

The conversation of two soldiers, who were nearest them, nearly caused the hearts of the hiding listeners to stop beating.

"Is there not a cave near here?" asked one. "Let us search for it!"

"Nonsense," said the other. "I tell you that they could not have come this far already."

"Why could they not have escaped when the guard changed at midnight?" insisted the first speaker.

"Because Paulo was seen crossing the courtyard at midnight, and they could have had no other chance of getting away until just before daybreak."

This answer seemed to satisfy his comrade, and the search was given up just as they were about to come upon the fugitives. It was a narrow escape, and, brave as the robber was, he looked pale, while Paulo was in a state of collapse.

Many times during the nights and days that followed, the brigand and his guide almost fell into the hands of the minions of the Prince. Exposure, privation, semi-starvation, and, worse than all, the alternate wrenchings of hope and fear, began to tell upon the stalwart frame of the brigand. Some days and nights of cold winter rain added to their misery. They dare not seek shelter, for every habitable place was watched.

When daylight overtook them on their last night's crawl through the valley, they were within a short distance of the waterfall, whose low roar now came soothingly down to them.

"Never mind the daylight," said Toza; "let us push on and reach the tunnel."

"I can go no farther," moaned Paulo; "I am exhausted."

"Nonsense," cried Toza; "it is but a short distance."

"The distance is greater than you think; besides, we are in full view of the castle. Would you risk everything now that the game is nearly won? You must not forget that the stake is your head; and remember what day this is."

"What day is it?" asked the brigand, turning on his guide.

"It is the fifteenth of January, the day on which you were to be executed."

Toza caught his breath sharply. Danger and want had made a coward of him and he shuddered now, which he had not done when he was on his trial and condemned to death.

"How do you know it is the fifteenth?" he asked at last.

Paulo held up his stick, notched after the method of Robinson Crusoe.

"I am not so strong as you are, and if you will let me rest here until the afternoon, I am willing to make a last effort, and try to reach the entrance of the tunnel."

"Very well," said Toza shortly.

As they lay there that forenoon neither could sleep. The noise of the waterfall was music to the ears of both; their long toilsome journey was almost over.

[Illustration: HE THREW ASIDE BUSHES, BRAMBLES AND LOGS]

"What did you do with the gold that you found in the mountains?" asked Toza suddenly.

Paulo was taken unawares, and answered, without thinking, "I left it where it was. I will get it after."

The brigand said nothing, but that remark condemned Paulo to death. Toza resolved to murder him as soon as they were well out of the tunnel, and get the

gold himself.

They left their hiding-place shortly before twelve o'clock, but their progress was so slow, crawling, as they had to do, up the steep side of the mountain, under cover of bushes and trees, that it was well after three when they came to the waterfall, which they crossed, as best they could, on stones and logs.

"There," said Toza, shaking himself, "that is our last wetting. Now for the tunnel!"

The rocky sides of the waterfall hid them from view of the castle, but Paulo called the brigand's attention to the fact that they could be easily seen from the other side of the valley.

"It doesn't matter now," said Toza; "lead the way as quickly as you can to the mouth of the cavern."

Paulo scrambled on until he reached a shelf about halfway up the cataract; he threw aside bushes, brambles, and logs, speedily disclosing a hole large enough to admit a man.

"You go first," said Paulo, standing aside.

"No," answered Toza; "you know the way, and must go first. You cannot think that I wish to harm you—I am completely unarmed.

"Nevertheless," said Paulo, "I shall not go first. I did not like the way you looked at me when I told you the gold was still in the hills. I admit that I distrust you."

"Oh, very well," laughed Toza, "it doesn't really matter." And he crawled into the hole in the rock, Paulo following him.

Before long the tunnel enlarged so that a man could stand upright.

"Stop!" said Paulo; "there is the door near here."

"Yes," said the robber, "I remember that you spoke of a door," adding, however, "What is it for, and why is it locked?"

"It is bolted on this side," answered Paulo, "and we shall have no difficulty in

opening it."

"What is it for?" repeated the brigand.

"It is to prevent the current of air running through the tunnel and blowing away the obstruction at this end," said the guide.

"Here it is," said Toza, as he felt down its edge for the bolt.

The bolt drew back easily, and the door opened. The next instant the brigand was pushed rudely into a room, and he heard the bolt thrust back into its place almost simultaneously with the noise of the closing door. For a moment his eyes were dazzled by the light. He was in an apartment blazing with torches held by a dozen men standing about.

In the centre of the room was a block covered with black cloth, and beside it stood a masked executioner resting the corner of a gleaming axe on the black draped block, with his hands crossed over the end of the axe's handle.

The Prince stood there surrounded by his ministers. Above his head was a clock, with the minute hand pointed to the hour of four.

"You are just in time!" said the Prince grimly; "we are waiting for you!"

"AND THE RIGOUR OF THE GAME."

Old Mr. Saunders went home with bowed head and angry brow. He had not known that Dick was in the habit of coming in late, but he had now no doubt of the fact. He himself went to bed early and slept soundly, as a man with a good conscience is entitled to do. But the boy's mother must have known the hours he kept, yet she had said nothing; this made the matter all the blacker. The father felt that mother and son were leagued against him. He had been too lenient; now he would go to the root of things. The young man would speedily change his ways or take the consequences. There would be no half measures.

Poor old Mrs. Saunders saw, the moment her husband came in, that there was a storm brewing, and a wild fear arose in her heart that her boy was the cause. The first words of the old man settled the question.

"What time did Richard come in last night?"

"I—I don't know," she hesitated. "Shuffling" her husband always called it. She had been a buffer between father and son since Dick was a child.

"Why don't you know? Who let him in?"

She sighed. The secret had long weighed upon her, and she felt it would come out at some hapless moment.

"He has a key," she said at last.

The old man glared in speechless amazement. In his angriest mood he had never suspected anything so bad as this.

"A key! How long has he had a key?"

"About six months. He did not want to disturb us."

"He is very thoughtful! Where does he spend his nights?"

"I don't know. He told me he belongs to a club, where he takes some kind of exercise."

"Did he tell you he exercised with cards? Did he say it was a gambling club?"

"I don't believe it is; I am sure Dick doesn't gamble. Dick is a good boy, father."

"A precious lot you know about it, evidently. Do you think his employer, banker Hammond, has any idea his clerk belongs to a gambling club?"

"I am sure I don't know. Is there any thing wrong? Has any one been speaking to you about Dick?"

"Yes; and not to his credit."

"Oh dear!" cried the mother in anguish. "Was it Mr. Hammond?"

"I have never spoken to Hammond in my life," said the old man, relenting a little when he saw how troubled his wife was. "No, I propose to stop this club business before it gets to the banker's ears that one of his clerks is a nightly attendant there. You will see Richard when he comes home this evening; tell him I wish to have a word or two with him to-night. He is to wait for me here. I will be in shortly after he has had his supper."

"You will not be harsh with him, father. Remember, he is a young man now, so please advise and do not threaten. Angry words can do no good."

"I will do my duty," said the old man, uncompromisingly.

Gentle Mrs. Saunders sighed—for she well knew the phrase about duty. It was a sure prelude to domestic trouble. When the old gentleman undertook to do his duty, he nailed his flag to the mast.

"See that he waits for me to-night," was the parting shot as the old man closed the door behind him.

Mrs. Saunders had had her share of trouble in this world, as every woman must who lives with a cantankerous man. When she could save her son a harsh word, or even a blow, she was content to take either uncomplainingly. The old man's severity had put him out of touch with his son. Dick sullenly resented his boyhood of continual fear. During recent years, when fear had gradually diminished and finally disappeared, he was somewhat troubled to find that the natural affection, which a son should have for his father, had vanished with it. He had, on several occasions, made half-hearted attempts at a better understanding, but these attempts had unfortunately fallen on inopportune moments, when the old man was not particularly gracious toward the world in general, and latterly there had been silence between the two. The young man avoided his father as much as possible; he would not have remained at home, had it not been for his mother. Her steady, unwavering affection for him, her belief in him, and the remembrance of how she had stood up for him, especially when he was in the wrong, had bound her to him with bonds soft as silk and strong as steel. He often felt it would be a pleasure to go wrong, merely to refute his father's ideas regarding the way a child should be brought up. Yet Dick had a sort of admiration for the old man, whose many good qualities were somewhat overshadowed by his brutal temper.

When Richard came home that evening he had his supper alone, as was usual with him. Mrs. Saunders drew her chair near the table, and while the meal went on she talked of many things, but avoided the subject uppermost in her mind, which she postponed until the last moment. Perhaps after all she would not need to ask him to stay; he might remain of his own accord. She watched him narrowly as she talked, and saw with alarm that there was anxiety in his face. Some care was worrying him, and she yearned to have him confide his trouble to her. And yet she talked and talked of other things. She noticed that he made but a poor pretence of eating, and that he allowed her to talk while he made few replies, and those absent-mindedly. At last he pushed back his chair with a laugh that sounded forced.

"Well, mother," he said, "what is it? Is there a row on, or is it merely looming in the horizon? Has the Lord of Creation——"

"Hush, Dick, you mustn't talk in that way. There is nothing much the matter, I hope? I want to speak with you about your club."

Dick looked sharply at his mother for a moment, then he said: "Well, what does

father want to know about the club? Does he wish to join?"

"I didn't say your father——"

"No, you didn't say it; but, my dear mother, you are as transparent as glass. I can see right through you and away beyond. Now, somebody has been talking to father about the club, and he is on the war-path. Well, what does he want to know?"

"He said it was a gambling club."

"Right for once."

"Oh, Dick, is it?"

"Certainly it is. Most clubs are gambling clubs and drinking clubs. I don't suppose the True Blues gamble more than others, but I'll bet they don't gamble any less."

"Oh, Dick, Dick, I'm sorry to hear that. And, Dick, my darling boy, do you——"

"Do I gamble, mother? No, I don't. I know you'll believe me, though the old man won't. But it's true, nevertheless. I can't afford it, for it takes money to gamble, and I'm not as rich as old Hammond yet."

"Oh yes, Dick dear, and that reminds me. Another thing your father feared was that Mr. Hammond might come to know you were a member of the club. It might hurt your prospects in the bank," she added, not wishing to frighten the boy with the threat of the dismissal she felt sure would follow the revelation.

Dick threw back his head and roared. For the first time that evening the lines of care left his brow. Then seeing his mother's look of incomprehension, he sobered down, repressing his mirth with some difficulty.

"Mother," he said at last, "things have changed since father was a boy; I'm afraid he hardly appreciates how much. The old terrifying relations between employer and employee do not exist now—at least, that is my experience."

"Still if Mr. Hammond came to know that you spent your evenings at——"

"Mother, listen to me a moment. Mr. Julius Hammond proposed me for membership in the club—my employer! I should never have thought of joining if it hadn't been for him. You remember my last raise in salary? You thought it was for merit, of course, and father thought it was luck. Well, it was neither—or both, perhaps. Now, this is confidential and to yourself only. I wouldn't tell it to any one else. Hammond called me into his private office one afternoon when the bank was closed, and said, 'Saunders, I want you to join the Athletic Club; I'll propose you.' I was amazed and told him I couldn't afford it. 'Yes, you can,' he answered. 'I'm going to raise your salary double the amount of entrance fee and annual. If you don't join I'll cut it down.' So I joined. I think I should have been a fool if I hadn't."

"Dick, I never heard of such a thing! What in the world did he want you to join for?"

"Well, mother," said Dick, looking at his watch, "that's a long story. I'll tell it to you some other evening. I haven't time to-night. I must be off."

"Oh, Dick, don't go to-night. Please stay at home, for my sake."

Dick smoothed his mother's grey hair and kissed her on the forehead. Then he said: "Won't to-morrow night do as well, mother? I can't stay to-night. I have an appointment at the club."

"Telegraph to them and put it off. Stay for my sake to-night, Dick. I never asked you before."

The look of anxiety came into his face again.

"Mother, it is impossible, really it is. Please don't ask me again. Anyhow, I know it is father who wants me to stay, not you. I presume he's on the duty tack. I think what he has to say will keep till to- morrow night. If he must work off some of his sentiments on gambling, let him place his efforts where they are needed—let him tackle Jule Hammond, but not during business hours."

"You surely don't mean to say that a respected business man—a banker like Mr. Hammond—gambles?"

"Don't I? Why, Hammond's a plunger from Plungerville, if you know what that means. From nine to three he is the strictest and best business man in the city. If

you spoke to him then of the True Blue Athletic Club he wouldn't know what you were talking about. But after three o'clock he'll take any odds you like to offer, from matching pennies to backing an unknown horse."

Mrs. Saunders sighed. It was a wicked world into which her boy had to go to earn his living, evidently.

"And now, mother, I really must be off. I'll stay at home to-morrow night and take my scolding like a man. Good-night."

He kissed her and hurried away before she could say anything more, leaving her sitting there with folded hands to await, with her customary patience and just a trifle of apprehension, the coming of her husband. There was no mistaking the heavy footfall. Mrs. Saunders smiled sadly as she heard it, remembering that Dick had said once that, even if he were safe within the gates of Paradise, the sound of his father's footsteps would make the chills run up his backbone. She had reproved the levity of the remark at the time, but she often thought of it, especially when she knew there was trouble ahead—as there usually was.

"Where's Richard? Isn't he home yet?" were the old man's first words.

"He has been home, but he had to go out again. He had an appointment."

"Did you tell him I wanted to speak with him?"

"Yes, and he said he would stay home to-morrow night."

"Did he know what I said to-night?"

"I'm not sure that I told him you——"

"Don't shuffle now. He either knew or he did not. Which is it?"

"Yes, he knew, but he thought it might not be urgent, and he——"

"That will do. Where is his appointment?"

"At the club, I think."

"Ah-h-h!" The old man dwelt on the exclamation as if he had at last drawn out

the reluctant worst. "Did he say when he would be home?"

"No."

"Very well. I will wait half-an-hour for him, and if he is not in by that time I will go to his club and have my talk with him there."

Old Mr. Saunders sat grimly down with his hat still on, and crossed his hands over the knob of his stout walking-stick, watching the clock that ticked slowly against the wall. Under these distressing circumstances the old woman lost her presence of mind and did the very thing she should not have done. She should have agreed with him, but instead of that she opposed the plan and so made it inevitable. It would be a cruel thing, she said, to shame their son before his friends, to make him a laughing-stock among his acquaintances. Whatever was to be said could be said as well to-morrow night as to-night, and that in their own home, where, at least, no stranger would overhear. As the old man made no answer but silently watched the clock, she became almost indignant with him. She felt she was culpable in entertaining even the suspicion of such a feeling against her lawful husband, but it did seem to her that he was not acting judiciously towards Dick. She hoped to turn his resentment from their son to herself, and would have welcomed any outburst directed against her alone. In this excited state, being brought, as it were, to bay, she had the temerity to say—

"You are wrong about one thing, and you may also be wrong in thinking Dick—in—in what you think about Dick."

The old man darted one lowering look at her, and though she trembled, she welcomed the glance as indicating the success of her red herring.

"What was I wrong about?"

"You were wrong—Mr. Hammond knows Dick is a member of the club. He is a member himself and he insisted Dick should join. That's why he raised his salary."

"A likely story! Who told you that?"

"Dick told me himself."

"And you believed it, of course!" Saunders laughed in a sneering, cynical sort of

way and resumed his scrutiny of the clock. The old woman gave up the fight and began to weep silently, hoping, but in vain, to hear the light step of her son approaching the door. The clock struck the hour; the old man rose without a word, drew his hat further over his brow, and left the house.

Up to the last moment Mrs. Saunders hardly believed her husband would carry out his threat. Now, when she realised he was determined, she had one wild thought of flying to the club and warning her son. A moment's consideration put that idea out of the question. She called the serving-maid, who came, as it seemed to the anxious woman, with exasperating deliberation.

"Jane," she cried, "do you know where the Athletic Club is? Do you know where Centre Street is?"

Jane knew neither club nor locality.

"I want a message taken there to Dick, and it must go quickly. Don't you think you could run there——"

"It would be quicker to telegraph, ma'am," said Jane, who was not anxious to run anywhere. "There's telegraph paper in Mr. Richard's room, and the office is just round the corner."

"That's it, Jane; I'm glad you thought of it. Get me a telegraph form.
Do make haste."

She wrote with a trembling hand, as plainly as she could, so that her son might have no difficulty in reading:—

"*Richard Saunders, Athletic Club, Centre Street.*

"Your father is coming to see you. He will be at the club before half-an-hour."

"There is no need to sign it; he will know his mother's writing," said Mrs. Saunders, as she handed the message and the money to Jane; and Jane made no comment, for she knew as little of telegraphing as did her mistress. Then the old woman, having done her best, prayed that the telegram might arrive before her husband; and her prayer was answered, for electricity is more speedy than an old man's legs.

Meanwhile Mr. Saunders strode along from the suburb to the city. His stout stick struck the stone pavement with a sharp click that sounded in the still, frosty, night air almost like a pistol shot. He would show both his wife and his son that he was not too old to be master in his own house. He talked angrily to himself as he went along, and was wroth to find his anger lessening as he neared his destination. Anger must be very just to hold its own during a brisk walk in evening air that is cool and sweet.

Mr. Saunders was somewhat abashed to find the club building a much more imposing edifice than he had expected. There was no low, groggy appearance about the True Blue Athletic Club. It was brilliantly lit from basement to attic. A group of men, with hands in pockets, stood on the kerb as if waiting for something. There was an air of occasion about the place. The old man inquired of one of the loafers if that was the Athletic Club.

"Yes, it is," was the answer; "are you going in?"

"I intend to."

"Are you a member?"

"No."

"Got an invitation?"

"No."

"Then I suspect you won't go in. We've tried every dodge ourselves."

The possibility of not getting in had never occurred to the old gentleman, and the thought that his son, safe within the sacred precincts of a club, might defy him, flogged his flagging anger and aroused his dogged determination.

"I'll try, at least," he said, going up the stone steps.

The men watched him with a smile on their lips. They saw him push the electric button, whereupon the door opened slightly. There was a brief, unheard parley; then the door swung wide open, and, when Mr. Saunders entered, it shut again.

"Well, I'm blest!" said the man on the kerb; "I wonder how the old duffer worked

it. I wish I had asked him." None of the rest made any comment; they were struck dumb with amazement at the success of the old gentleman, who had even to ask if that were the club.

When the porter opened the door he repeated one of the questions asked a moment before by the man on the kerb.

"Have you an invitation, sir?"

"No," answered the old man, deftly placing his stick so that the barely opened door could not be closed until it was withdrawn. "No! I want to see my son, Richard Saunders. Is he inside?"

The porter instantly threw open the door.

"Yes, sir," he said. "They're expecting you, sir. Kindly come this way, sir."

The old man followed, wondering at the cordiality of his reception. There must be some mistake. Expecting him? How could that be! He was led into a most sumptuous parlour where a cluster of electric lamps in the ceiling threw a soft radiance around the room.

"Be seated, sir. I will tell Mr. Hammond that you are here."

"But—stop a moment. I don't want to see Mr. Hammond. I have nothing to do with Mr. Hammond. I want to see my son. Is it Mr. Hammond the banker?"

"Yes, sir. He told me to bring you in here when you came and to let him know at once."

The old man drew his hand across his brow, and ere he could reply the porter had disappeared. He sat down in one of the exceedingly easy leather chairs and gazed in bewilderment around the room. The fine pictures on the wall related exclusively to sporting subjects. A trim yacht, with its tall, slim masts and towering cloud of canvas at an apparently dangerous angle, seemed sailing directly at the spectator. Pugilists, naked to the waists, held their clinched fists in menacing attitudes. Race-horses, in states of activity and at rest, were interspersed here and there. In the centre of the room stood a pedestal of black marble, and upon it rested a huge silver vase encrusted with ornamentation. The old man did not know that this elaborate specimen of the silversmith's art was

referred to as the "Cup." Some one had hung a placard on it, bearing, in crudely scrawled letters the words:—

"Fare thee well, and if for ever
Still for ever Fare thee well."

While the old man was wondering what all this meant, the curtain suddenly parted and there entered an elderly gentleman somewhat jauntily attired in evening dress with a rose at his buttonhole. Saunders instantly recognised him as the banker, and he felt a resentment at what he considered his foppish appearance, realising almost at the same moment the rustiness of his own clothes, an everyday suit, not too expensive even when new.

"How are you, Mr. Saunders?" cried the banker, cordially extending his hand. "I am very pleased indeed to meet you. We got your telegram, but thought it best not to give it to Dick. I took the liberty of opening it myself. You see we can't be too careful about these little details. I told the porter to look after you and let me know the moment you came. Of course you are very anxious about your boy."

"I am," said the old man firmly. "That's why I'm here."

"Certainly, certainly. So are we all, and I presume I'm the most anxious man of the lot. Now what you want to know is how he is getting along?"

"Yes; I want to know the truth."

"Well, unfortunately, the truth is about as gloomy as it can be. He's been going from bad to worse, and no man is more sorry than I am."

"Do you mean to tell me so?"

"Yes. There is no use deluding ourselves. Frankly, I have no hope for him. There is not one chance in ten thousand of his recovering his lost ground."

The old man caught his breath, and leaned on his cane for support. He realised now the hollowness of his previous anger. He had never for a moment believed the boy was going to the bad. Down underneath his crustiness was a deep love for his son and a strong faith in him. He had allowed his old habit of domineering to get the better of him, and now in searching after a phantom he had suddenly come upon a ghastly reality.

"Look here," said the banker, noticing his agitation, "have a drink of our Special Scotch with me. It is the best there is to be had for money. We always take off our hats when we speak of the Special in this club. Then we'll go and see how things are moving."

As he turned to order the liquor he noticed for the first time the placard on the cup.

"Now, who the dickens put that there?" he cried angrily. "There's no use in giving up before you're thrashed." Saying which, he took off the placard, tore it up, and threw it into the waste basket.

"Does Richard drink?" asked the old man huskily, remembering the eulogy on the Special.

"Bless you, no. Nor smoke either. No, nor gamble, which is more extraordinary. No, it's all right for old fellows like you and me to indulge in the Special—bless it—but a young man who needs to keep his nerves in order, has to live like a monk. I imagine it's a love affair. Of course, there's no use asking you: you would be the last one to know. When he came in to-night I saw he was worried over something. I asked him what it was, but he declared there was nothing wrong. Here's the liquor. You'll find that it reaches the spot."

The old man gulped down some of the celebrated "Special," then he said—

"Is it true that you induced my son to join this club?"

"Certainly. I heard what he could do from a man I had confidence in, and I said to myself, We must have young Saunders for a member."

"Then don't you think you are largely to blame?"

"Oh, if you like to put it that way; yes. Still I'm the chief loser. I lose ten thousand by him."

"Good God!" cried the stricken father.

The banker looked at the old man a little nervously, as if he feared his head was not exactly right. Then he said: "Of course you will be anxious to see how the thing ends. Come in with me, but be careful the boy doesn't catch sight of you. It

might rattle him. I'll get you a place at the back, where you can see without being seen."

They rose, and the banker led the way on tiptoe between the curtains into a large room filled with silent men earnestly watching a player at a billiard table in the centre of the apartment. Temporary seats had been built around the walls, tier above tier, and every place was taken. Saunders noticed his son standing near the table in his shirt- sleeves, with his cue butt downward on the ground. His face was pale and his lips compressed as he watched his opponent's play like a man fascinated. Evidently his back was against the wall, and he was fighting a hopeless fight, but was grit to the last.

Old Saunders only faintly understood the situation, but his whole sympathy went out to his boy, and he felt an instinctive hatred of the confident opponent who was knocking the balls about with a reckless accuracy which was evidently bringing dismay to the hearts of at least half the onlookers.

All at once there was a burst of applause, and the player stood up straight with a laugh.

"By Jove!" cried the banker, "he's missed. Didn't put enough stick behind it. That comes of being too blamed sure. Shouldn't wonder but there is going to be a turn of luck. Perhaps you'll prove a mascot, Mr. Saunders."

He placed the old man on an elevated seat at the back. There was a buzz of talk as young Saunders stood there chalking his cue, apparently loth to begin.

Hammond mixed among the crowd, and spoke eagerly now to one, now to another. Old Saunders said to the man next him—

"What is it all about? Is this an important match?"

"Important! You bet it is. I suppose there's more money on this game than was ever put on a billiard match before. Why, Jule Hammond alone has ten thousand on Saunders."

The old man gave a quivering sigh of relief. He was beginning to understand. The ten thousand, then, was not the figures of a defalcation.

"Yes," continued the other, "it's the great match for the cup. There's been a series

of games, and this is the culminating one. Prognor has won one, and Saunders one; now this game settles it. Prognor is the man of the High Fliers' Club. He's a good one. Saunders won the cup for this club last year, so they can't kick much if they lose it now. They've never had a man to touch Saunders in this club since it began. I doubt if there's another amateur like him in this country. He's a man to be proud of, although he seemed to go to pieces to-night. They'll all be down on him to-morrow if they lose their money, although he don't make anything one way or another. I believe it's the high betting that's made him so anxious and spoiled his play."

"Hush, hush!" was whispered around the room. Young Saunders had begun to play. Prognor stood by with a superior smile on his lips. He was certain to go out when his turn came again.

Saunders played very carefully, taking no risks, and his father watched him with absorbed, breathless interest. Though he knew nothing of the game he soon began to see how points were made. The boy never looked up from the green cloth and the balls. He stepped around the table to his different positions without hurry, and yet without undue tardiness. All eyes were fastened on his play, and there was not a sound in the large room but the ever-recurring click-click of the balls. The father marvelled at the almost magical command the player had over the ivory spheres. They came and went, rebounded and struck, seemingly because he willed this result or that. There was a dexterity of touch, and accurate measurement of force, a correct estimate of angles, a truth of the eye, and a muscular control that left the old man amazed that the combination of all these delicate niceties were concentrated in one person, and that person his own son.

At last two of the balls lay close together, and the young man, playing very deftly, appeared to be able to keep them in that position as if he might go on scoring indefinitely. He went on in this way for some time, when suddenly the silence was broken by Prognor crying out—

"I don't call that billiards. It's baby play."

Instantly there was an uproar. Saunders grounded his cue on the floor and stood calmly amidst the storm, his eyes fixed on the green cloth. There were shouts of "You were not interrupted," "That's for the umpire to decide," "Play your game, Saunders," "Don't be bluffed." The old man stood up with the rest, and his natural combativeness urged him to take part in the fray and call for fair play.

The umpire rose and demanded order. When the tumult had subsided, he sat down. Some of the High Fliers, however, cried, "Decision! Decision!"

"There is nothing to decide," said the umpire, severely. "Go on with your play, Mr. Saunders."

Then young Saunders did a thing that took away the breath of his friends. He deliberately struck the balls with his cue ball and scattered them far and wide. A simultaneous sigh seemed to rise from the breasts of the True Blues.

"That is magnificent, but it is not war," said the man beside old Saunders. "He has no right to throw away a single chance when he is so far behind."

"Oh, he's not so far behind. Look at the score," put in a man on the right.

Saunders carefully nursed the balls up together once more, scored off them for a while, and again he struck them far apart. This he did three times. He apparently seemed bent on showing how completely he had the table under his control. Suddenly a great cheer broke out, and young Saunders rested as before without taking his eyes from the cloth.

"What does that mean?" cried the old man excitedly, with dry lips.

"Why, don't you see? He's tied the score. I imagine this is almost an unprecedented run. I believe he's got Prognor on toast, if you ask me."

Hammond came up with flushed face, and grasped the old man by the arm with a vigour that made him wince.

"Did you ever see anything grander than that?" he said, under cover of the momentary applause. "I'm willing to lose my ten thousand now without a murmur. You see, you are a mascot after all."

The old man was too much excited to speak, but he hoped the boy would take no more chances. Again came the click-click of the balls. The father was pleased to see that Dick played now with all the care and caution he had observed at first. The silence became intense, almost painful. Every man leaned forward and scarcely breathed.

All at once Prognor strode down to the billiard-table and stretched his hand

across it. A cheer shook the ceiling. The cup would remain on its black marble pedestal. Saunders had won. He took the outstretched hand of his defeated opponent, and the building rang again.

Banker Hammond pushed his way through the congratulating crowd and smote the winner cordially on the shoulder.

"That was a great run, Dick, my boy. The old man was your mascot. Your luck changed the moment he came in. Your father had his eye on you all the time."

"What!" cried Dick, with a jump.

A flush came over his pale face as he caught his father's eye, although the old man's glance was kindly enough.

"I'm very proud of you, my son," said his father, when at last he reached him. "It takes skill and pluck and nerve to win a contest like that. I'm off now; I want to tell your mother about it."

"Wait a moment, father, and we'll walk home together," said Dick.

THE BROMLEY GIBBERTS STORY.

The room in which John Shorely edited the *Weekly Sponge* was not luxuriously furnished, but it was comfortable. A few pictures decorated the walls, mostly black and white drawings by artists who were so unfortunate as to be compelled to work for the *Sponge* on the cheap. Magazines and papers were littered all about, chiefly American in their origin, for Shorely had been brought up in the editorial school which teaches that it is cheaper to steal from a foreign publication than waste good money on original contributions. You clipped out the story; changed New York to London; Boston or Philadelphia to Manchester or Liverpool, and there you were.

Shorely's theory was that the public was a fool, and didn't know the difference. Some of the greatest journalistic successes in London proved the fact, he claimed, yet the *Sponge* frequently bought stories from well-known authors, and bragged greatly about it.

Shorely's table was littered with manuscripts, but the attention of the great editor was not upon them. He sat in his wooden armchair, with his gaze on the fire and a frown on his brow. The *Sponge* was not going well, and he feared he would have to adopt some of the many prize schemes that were such a help to pure literature elsewhere, or offer a thousand pounds insurance, tied up in such a way that it would look lavishly generous to the constant reader, and yet be impossible to collect if a disaster really occurred.

In the midst of his meditations a clerk entered and announced—"Mr. Bromley Gibberts."

"Tell him I'm busy just now—tell him I'm engaged," said the editor, while the perplexed frown deepened on his brow.

The clerk's conscience; however, was never burdened with that message, for

Gibberts entered, with a long ulster coat flapping about his heels.

"That's all right," said Gibberts, waving his hand at the boy, who stood with open mouth, appalled at the intrusion. "You heard what Mr. Shorely said. He's engaged. Therefore let no one enter. Get out."

The boy departed, closing the door after him. Gibberts turned the key in the lock, and then sat down.

"There," he said; "now we can talk unmolested, Shorely. I should think you would be pestered to death by all manner of idiots who come in and interrupt you."

"I am," said the editor, shortly.

"Then take my plan, and lock your door. Communicate with the outer office through a speaking-tube. I see you are down-hearted, so I have come to cheer you up. I've brought you a story, my boy."

Shorely groaned.

"My dear Gibberts," he said, "we have now——"

"Oh yes, I know all about that. You have matter enough on hand to run the paper for the next fifteen years. If this is a comic story, you are buying only serious stuff. If this be tragic, humour is what you need. Of course, the up-and-down truth is that you are short of money, and can't pay my price. The *Sponge* is failing—everybody knows that. Why can't you speak the truth, Shorely, to me, at least? If you practiced an hour a day, and took lessons—from me, for instance—you would be able in a month to speak several truthful sentences one after the other."

The editor laughed bitterly.

"You are complimentary," he said.

"I'm not. Try again, Shorely. Say I'm a boorish ass."

"Well, you are."

"There, you see how easy it is! Practice is everything. Now, about this story, will you——"

"I will not. As you are not an advertiser, I don't mind admitting to you that the paper is going down. You see it comes to the same thing. We haven't the money as you say, so what's the use of talking?"

Gibberts hitched his chair closer to the editor, and placed his hand on the other's knee. He went on earnestly—

"Now is the time to talk, Shorely. In a little while it will be too late. You will have thrown up the *Sponge*. Your great mistake is trying to ride two horses, each facing a different direction. It can't be done, my boy. Make up your mind whether you are going to be a thief or an honest man. That's the first step."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Go in for a paper that will be entirely stolen property, or for one made up of purely original matter."

"We have a great deal of original matter in the *Sponge*."

"Yes, and that's what I object to. Have it all original, or have it all stolen. Be fish or fowl. At least one hundred men a week see a stolen article in the *Sponge* which they have read elsewhere. They then believe it is all stolen, and you lose them. That isn't business, so I want to sell you one original tale, which will prove to be the most remarkable story written in England this year."

"Oh, they all are," said Shorely, wearily. "Every story sent to me is a most remarkable story, in the author's opinion."

"Look here, Shorely," cried Gibberts, angrily, "you mustn't talk to me like that. I'm no unknown author, a fact of which you are very well aware. I don't need to peddle my goods."

"Then why do you come here lecturing me?"

"For your own good, Shorely, my boy," said Gibberts, calming down as rapidly as he had flared up. He was a most uncertain man. "For your own good, and if you don't take this story, some one else will. It will make the fortune of the paper

that secures it. Now, you read it while I wait. Here it is, typewritten, at one-and-three a thousand words, all to save your blessed eyesight."

Shorely took the manuscript and lit the gas, for it was getting dark. Gibberts sat down awhile, but soon began to pace the room, much to Shorely's manifest annoyance. Not content with this, he picked up the poker and noisily stirred the fire. "For Heaven's sake, sit down, Gibberts, and be quiet!" cried Shorely, at last.

Gibberts seized the poker as if it had been a weapon, and glared at the editor.

"I won't sit down, and I will make just as much noise as I want to," he roared. As he stood there defiantly, Shorely saw a gleam of insanity in his eyes.

"Oh, very well, then," said Shorely, continuing to read the story.

For a moment Gibberts stood grasping the poker by the middle, then he flung it with a clatter on the fender, and, sitting down, gazed moodily into the fire, without moving, until Shorely had turned the last page.

"Well," said Gibberts, rousing from his reverie, "what do you think of it?"

"It's a good story, Gibberts. All your stories are good," said the editor, carelessly.

Gibberts started to his feet, and swore.

"Do you mean to say," he thundered, "that you see nothing in that story different from any I or any one else ever wrote? Hang it, Shorely, you wouldn't know a good story if you met it coming up Fleet Street! Can't you see that story is written with a man's heart's blood?"

Shorely stretched out his legs and thrust his hands far down in his trousers' pockets.

"It may have been written as you say, although I thought you called my attention a moment ago to its type-written character."

"Don't be flippant, Shorely," said Gibberts, relapsing again into melancholy. "You don't like the story, then? You didn't see anything unusual in it—purpose, force, passion, life, death, nothing?"

"There is death enough at the end. My objection is that there is too much blood and thunder in it. Such a tragedy could never happen. No man could go to a country house and slaughter every one in it. It's absurd."

Gibberts sprang from his seat and began to pace the room excitedly. Suddenly he stopped before his friend, towering over him, his long ulster making him look taller than he really was.

"Did I ever tell you the tragedy of my life? How the property that would have kept me from want has——"

"Of course you have, Gibberts. Sit down. You've told it to everybody.
To me several times."

"How my cousin cheated me out of——"

"Certainly. Out of land and the woman you loved."

"Oh! I told you that, did I?" said Gibberts, apparently abashed at the other's familiarity with the circumstances. He sat down, and rested his head in his hands. There was a long silence between the two, which was finally broken by Gibberts saying—

"So you don't care about the story?"

"Oh, I don't say that. I can see it is the story of your own life, with an imaginary and sanguinary ending."

"Oh, you saw that, did you?"

"Yes. How much do you want for it?"

"£50."

"What?"

"£50, I tell you. Are you deaf? And I want the money now."

"Bless your innocent heart, I can buy a longer story than that from the greatest author living for less than £50. Gibberts, you're crazy."

Gibberts looked up suddenly and inquiringly, as if that thought had never occurred to him before. He seemed rather taken with the idea. It would explain many things which had puzzled both himself and his friends. He meditated upon the matter for a few moments, but at last shook his head.

"No, Shorely," he said, with a sigh. "I'm not insane, though, goodness knows, I've had enough to drive me mad. I don't seem to have the luck of some people. I haven't the talent for going crazy. But to return to the story. You think £50 too much for it. It will make the fortune of the paper that publishes it. Let me see. I had it a moment ago, but the point has escaped my memory. What was it you objected to as unnatural?"

"The tragedy. There is too much wholesale murder at the end."

"Ah! now I have it! Now I recollect!"

Gibberts began energetically to pace the room again, smiting his hands together. His face was in a glow of excitement.

"Yes, I have it now. The tragedy. Granting a murder like that, one man a dead shot, killing all the people in a country house; imagine it actually taking place. Wouldn't all England ring with it?"

"Naturally."

"Of course it would. Now, you listen to me. I'm going to commit that so-called crime. One week after you publish the story, I'm going down to that country house, Channor Chase. It is my house, if there was justice and right in England, and I'm going to slaughter every one in it. I will leave a letter, saying the story in the *Sponge* is the true story of what led to the tragedy. Your paper in a week will be the most-talked-of journal in England—in the world. It will leap instantaneously into a circulation such as no weekly on earth ever before attained. Look here, Shorely, that story is worth £50,000 rather than £50, and if you don't buy it at once, some one else will. Now, what do you say?"

"I say you are joking, or else, as I said just now, you are as mad as a hatter."

"Admitting I am mad, will you take the story?"

"No, but I'll prevent you committing the crime."

"How?"

"By giving you in charge. By informing on you."

"You can't do it. Until such a crime is committed, no one would believe it could be committed. You have no witnesses to our conversation here, and I will deny every assertion you make. My word, at present, is as good as yours. All you can do is to ruin your chance of fortune, which knocks at every man's door. When I came in, you were wondering what you could do to put the *Sponge* on its feet. I saw it in your attitude. Now, what do you say?"

"I'll give you £25 for the story on its own merits, although it is a big price, and you need not commit the crime."

"Done! That is the sum I wanted, but I knew if I asked it, you would offer me £12 10_s_. Will you publish it within the month?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Write out the cheque. Don't cross it. I've no bank account."

When the cheque was handed to him, Gibberts thrust it into the ticket- pocket of his ulster, turned abruptly, and unlocked the door. "Good- bye," he said.

As he disappeared, Shorely noticed how long his ulster was, and how it flapped about his heels. The next time he saw the novelist was under circumstances that could never be effaced from his memory.

The *Sponge* was a sixteen-page paper, with a blue cover, and the week Gibberts' story appeared, it occupied the first seven pages. As Shorely ran it over in the paper, it impressed him more than it had done in manuscript. A story always seems more convincing in type.

Shorely met several men at the Club, who spoke highly of the story, and at last he began to believe it was a good one himself. Johnson was particularly enthusiastic, and every one in the Club knew Johnson's opinion was infallible.

"How did *you* come to get hold of it?" he said to Shorely, with unnecessary emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Don't you think I know a good story when I see it?" asked the editor, indignantly.

"It isn't the general belief of the Club," replied Johnson, airily; "but then, all the members have sent you contributions, so perhaps that accounts for it. By the way, have you seen Gibberts lately?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Well, it strikes me he is acting rather queerly. If you asked me, I don't think he is quite sane. He has something on his mind."

"He told me," said the new member, with some hesitation—"but really I don't think I'm justified in mentioning it, although he did not tell it in confidence—that he was the rightful heir to a property in——"

"Oh, we all know that story!" cried the Club, unanimously.

"I think it's the Club whiskey," said one of the oldest members. "I say, it's the worst in London."

"Verbal complaints not received. Write to the Committee," put in Johnson. "If Gibberts has a friend in the Club, which I doubt, that friend should look after him. I believe he will commit suicide yet."

These sayings troubled Shorely as he walked back to his office. He sat down to write a note, asking Gibberts to call. As he was writing, McCabe, the business manager of the *Sponge*, came in.

"What's the matter with the old sheet this week?" he asked.

"Matter? I don't understand you."

"Well, I have just sent an order to the printer to run off an extra ten thousand, and here comes a demand from Smith's for the whole lot. The extra ten thousand were to go to different newsagents all over the country who have sent repeat orders, so I have told the printer now to run off at least twenty-five thousand, and to keep the plates on the press. I never read the *Sponge* myself, so I thought I would drop in and ask you what the attraction was. This rush is unnatural.

"Better read the paper and find out," said Shorely.

"I would, if there wasn't so much of your stuff in it," retorted McCabe.

Next day McCabe reported an almost bewildering increase in orders. He had a jubilant "we've-done-it-at-last" air that exasperated Shorely, who felt that he alone should have the credit. There had come no answer to the note he had sent Gibberts, so he went to the Club, in the hope of meeting him. He found Johnson, whom he asked if Gibberts were there.

"He's not been here to-day," said Johnson; "but I saw him yesterday, and what do you think he was doing? He was in a gun-shop in the Strand, buying cartridges for that villainous-looking seven-shooter of his. I asked him what he was going to do with a revolver in London, and he told me, shortly, that it was none of my business, which struck me as so accurate a summing-up of the situation, that I came away without making further remark. If you want any more stories by Gibberts, you should look after him."

Shorely found himself rapidly verging into a state of nervousness regarding Gibberts. He was actually beginning to believe the novelist meditated some wild action, which might involve others in a disagreeable complication. Shorely had no desire to be accessory either before or after the fact. He hurried back to the office, and there found Gibberts' belated reply to his note. He hastily tore it open, and the reading of it completely banished what little self-control he had left.

"Dear Shorely,—I know why you want to see me, but I have so many affairs to settle, that it is impossible for me to call upon you. However, have no fears; I shall stand to my bargain, without any goading from you. Only a few days have elapsed since the publication of the story, and I did not promise the tragedy before the week was out. I leave for Channor Chase this afternoon. You shall have your pound of flesh, and more.—Yours,

"**BROMLEY GIBBERTS.**"

Shorely was somewhat pale about the lips when he had finished this scrawl. He flung on his coat, and rushed into the street. Calling a hansom, he said—

"Drive to Kidner's Inn as quickly as you can. No. 15."

Once there, he sprang up the steps two at a time, and knocked at Gibberts' door. The novelist allowed himself the luxury of a "man," and it was the "man" who answered Shorely's imperious knock.

"Where's Gibberts?"

"He's just gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"To Euston Station, I believe, sir; and he took a hansom. He's going into the country for a week, sir, and I wasn't to forward his letters, so I haven't his address."

"Have you an 'ABC'?"

"Yes, sir; step inside, sir. Mr. Gibberts was just looking up trains in it, sir, before he left."

Shorely saw it was open at C, and, looking down the column to Channor, he found that a train left in about twenty minutes. Without a word, he dashed down the stairs again. The "man" did not seem astonished. Queer fish sometimes came to see his master.

"Can you get me to Euston Station in twenty minutes?"

The cabman shook his head, as he said—

"I'll do my best, sir, but we ought to have a good half-hour."

The driver did his best, and landed Shorely on the departure platform two minutes after the train had gone.

"When is the next train to Channor?" demanded Shorely of a porter.

"Just left, sir."

"The next train hasn't just left, you fool. Answer my question."

"Two hours and twenty minutes, sir," replied the porter, in a huff.

Shorely thought of engaging a special, but realised he hadn't money enough. Perhaps he could telegraph and warn the people of Channor Chase, but he did not know to whom to telegraph. Or, again, he thought he might have Gibberts arrested on some charge or other at Channor Station. That, he concluded, was the way out—dangerous, but feasible.

By this time, however, the porter had recovered his equanimity. Porters cannot afford to cherish resentment, and this particular porter saw half a crown in the air.

"Did you wish to reach Channor before the train that's just gone, sir?"

"Yes. Can it be done?"

"It might be done, sir," said the porter, hesitatingly, as if he were on the verge of divulging a State secret which would cost him his situation. He wanted the half-crown to become visible before he committed himself further.

"Here's half a sovereign, if you tell me how it can be done, short of hiring a special."

"Well, sir, you could take the express that leaves at the half-hour. It will carry you fifteen miles beyond Channor, to Buley Junction, then in seventeen minutes you can get a local back to Channor, which is due three minutes before the down train reaches there—if the local is in time," he added, when the gold piece was safe stowed in his pocket.

While waiting for the express, Shorely bought a copy of the *Sponge*, and once more he read Gibberts' story on the way down. The third reading appalled him. He was amazed he had not noticed before the deadly earnestness of its tone. We are apt to underrate or overrate the work of a man with whom we are personally familiar.

Now, for the first time, Shorely seemed to get the proper perspective. The reading left him in a state of nervous collapse. He tried to remember whether or not he had burned Gibberts' letter. If he had left it on his table, anything might happen. It was incriminating evidence.

The local was five minutes late at the Junction, and it crawled over the fifteen miles back to Channor in the most exasperating way, losing time with every

mile. At Channor he found the London train had come and gone.

"Did a man in a long ulster get off, and——"

"For Channor Chase, sir?"

"Yes. Has he gone?"

"Oh yes, sir! The dog-cart from the Chase was here to meet him, sir."

"How far is it?"

"About five miles by road, if you mean the Chase, sir."

"Can I get a conveyance?"

"I don't think so, sir. They didn't know you were coming, I suppose, or they would have waited; but if you take the road down by the church, you can get there before the cart, sir. It isn't more than two miles from the church. You'll find the path a bit dirty, I'm afraid, sir, but not worse than the road. You can't miss the way, and you can send for your luggage."

It had been raining, and was still drizzling. A strange path is sometimes difficult to follow, even in broad daylight, but a wet, dark evening adds tremendously to the problem. Shorely was a city man, and quite unused to the eccentricities of country lanes and paths.

He first mistook the gleaming surface of a ditch for the footpath, and only found his mistake when he was up to his waist in water. The rain came on heavily again, and added to his troubles. After wandering through muddy fields for some time, he came to a cottage, where he succeeded in securing a guide to Channor Chase.

The time he had lost wandering in the fields would, Shorely thought, allow the dog-cart to arrive before him, and such he found to be the case. The man who answered Shorely's imperious summons to the door was surprised to find a wild-eyed, unkempt, bedraggled individual, who looked like a lunatic or a tramp.

"Has Mr. Bromley Gibberts arrived yet?" he asked, without preliminary talk.

"Yes, sir," answered the man.

"Is he in his room?"

"No, sir. He has just come down, after dressing, and is in the drawing- room.

"I must see him at once," gasped Shorely. "It is a matter of life and death. Take me to the drawing-room."

The man, in some bewilderment, led him to the door of the drawing-room, and Shorely heard the sound of laughter from within. Thus ever are comedy and tragedy mingled. The man threw the door open, and Shorely entered. The sight he beheld at first dazzled him, for the room was brilliantly lighted. He saw a number of people, ladies and gentlemen, all in evening dress, and all looking towards the door, with astonishment in their eyes. Several of them, he noticed, had copies of the *Sponge* in their hands. Bromley Gibberts stood before the fire, and was very evidently interrupted in the middle of a narration.

"I assure you," he was saying, "that is the only way by which a story of the highest class can be sold to a London editor."

He stopped as he said this, and turned to look at the intruder. It was a moment or two before he recognised the dapper editor in the bedraggled individual who stood, abashed, at the door.

"By the gods!" he exclaimed, waving his hands. "Speak of the editor, and he appears. In the name of all that's wonderful, Shorely, how did you come here? Have your deeds at last found you out? Have they ducked you in a horse-pond? I have just been telling my friends here how I sold you that story, which is making the fortune of the *Sponge*. Come forward, and show yourself, Shorely, my boy."

"I would like a word with you," stammered Shorely.

"Then, have it here," said the novelist. "They all understand the circumstances. Come and tell them your side of the story."

"I warn you," said Shorely, pulling himself together, and addressing the company, "that this man contemplates a dreadful crime, and I have come here to prevent it."

Gibberts threw back his head, and laughed loudly.

"Search me," he cried. "I am entirely unarmed, and, as every one here knows, among my best friends."

"Goodness!" said one old lady. "You don't mean to say that Channor Chase is the scene of your story, and where the tragedy was to take place?"

"Of course it is," cried Gibberts, gleefully. "Didn't you recognise the local colour? I thought I described Channor Chase down to the ground, and did I not tell you you were all my victims? I always forget some important detail when telling a story. Don't go yet," he said, as Shorely turned away; "but tell your story, then we will have each man's narrative, after the style of Wilkie Collins."

But Shorely had had enough, and, in spite of pressing invitations to remain, he departed out into the night, cursing the eccentricities of literary men.

NOT ACCORDING TO THE CODE.

Even a stranger to the big town walking for the first time through London, sees on the sides of the houses many names with which he has long been familiar. His precognition has cost the firms those names represent much money in advertising. The stranger has had the names before him for years in newspapers and magazines, on the hoardings and boards by the railway side, paying little heed to them at the time; yet they have been indelibly impressed on his brain, and when he wishes soap or pills his lips almost automatically frame the words most familiar to them. Thus are the lavish sums spent in advertising justified, and thus are many excellent publications made possible.

When you come to ponder over the matter, it seems strange that there should ever be any real man behind the names so lavishly advertised; that there should be a genuine Smith or Jones whose justly celebrated medicines work such wonders, or whose soap will clean even a guilty conscience. Granting the actual existence of these persons and probing still further into the mystery, can any one imagine that the excellent Smith to whom thousands of former sufferers send entirely unsolicited testimonials, or the admirable Jones whom *prima donnas* love because his soap preserves their dainty complexions—can any one credit the fact that Smith and Jones have passions like other men, have hatreds, likes and dislikes?

Such a condition of things, incredible as it may appear, exists in London. There are men in the metropolis, utterly unknown personally, whose names are more widely spread over the earth than the names of the greatest novelists, living or dead, and these men have feeling and form like unto ourselves.

There was the firm of Danby and Strong for instance. The name may mean nothing to any reader of these pages, but there was a time when it was well-known and widely advertised, not only in England but over the greater part of the world as well. They did a great business, as every firm that spends a fortune

every year in advertising is bound to do. It was in the old paper-collar days. There actually was a time when the majority of men wore paper collars, and, when you come to think of it, the wonder is that the paper-collar trade ever fell away as it did, when you consider with what vile laundries London is and always has been cursed. Take the Danby and Strong collars for instance, advertised as being so similar to linen that only an expert could tell the difference. That was Strong's invention. Before he invented the Piccadilly collar so-called, paper collars had a brilliant glaze that would not have deceived the most recent arrival from the most remote shire in the country. Strong devised some method by which a slight linen film was put on the paper, adding strength to the collar and giving it the appearance of the genuine article. You bought a pasteboard box containing a dozen of these collars for something like the price you paid for the washing of half a dozen linen ones. The Danby and Strong Piccadilly collar jumped at once into great popularity, and the wonder is that the linen collar ever recovered from the blow dealt it by this ingenious invention.

Curiously enough, during the time the firm was struggling to establish itself, the two members of it were the best of friends, but when prosperity came to them, causes of difference arose, and their relations, as the papers say of warlike nations, became strained. Whether the fault lay with John Danby or with William Strong no one has ever been able to find out. They had mutual friends who claimed that each one of them was a good fellow, but those friends always added that Strong and Danby did not "hit it off."

Strong was a bitter man when aroused, and could generally be counted upon to use harsh language. Danby was quieter, but there was a sullen streak of stubbornness in him that did not tend to the making up of a quarrel. They had been past the speaking point for more than a year, when there came a crisis in their relations with each other, that ended in disaster to the business carried on under the title of Danby and Strong. Neither man would budge, and between them the business sunk to ruin. Where competition is fierce no firm can stand against it if there is internal dissension. Danby held his ground quietly but firmly, Strong raged and cursed, but was equally steadfast in not yielding a point. Each hated the other so bitterly that each was willing to lose his own share in a profitable business, if by doing so he could bring ruin on his partner.

We are all rather prone to be misled by appearances. As one walks down Piccadilly, or the Strand, or Fleet Street and meets numerous irreproachably dressed men with glossy tall hats and polished boots, with affable manners and a

courteous way of deporting themselves toward their fellows, we are apt to fall into the fallacy of believing that these gentlemen are civilised. We fail to realise that if you probe in the right direction you will come upon possibilities of savagery that would draw forth the warmest commendation from a Pawnee Indian. There are reputable business men in London who would, if they dared, tie an enemy to a stake and roast him over a slow fire, and these men have succeeded so well, not only in deceiving their neighbours, but also themselves, that they would actually be offended if you told them so. If law were suspended in London for one day, during which time none of us would be held answerable for any deed then done, how many of us would be alive next morning? Most of us would go out to pot some favourite enemy, and would doubtless be potted ourselves before we got safely home again.

The law, however, is a great restrainer, and helps to keep the death- rate from reaching excessive proportions. One department of the law crushed out the remnant of the business of Messrs. Danby and Strong, leaving the firm bankrupt, while another department of the law prevented either of the partners taking the life of the other.

When Strong found himself penniless, he cursed, as was his habit, and wrote to a friend in Texas asking if he could get anything to do over there. He was tired of a country of law and order, he said, which was not as complimentary to Texas as it might have been. But his remark only goes to show what extraordinary ideas Englishmen have of foreign parts. The friend's answer was not very encouraging, but, nevertheless, Strong got himself out there somehow, and in course of time became a cowboy. He grew reasonably expert with his revolver and rode a mustang as well as could be expected, considering that he had never seen such an animal in London, even at the Zoo. The life of a cowboy on a Texas ranch leads to the forgetting of such things as linen shirts and paper collars.

Strong's hatred of Danby never ceased, but he began to think of him less often.

One day, when he least expected it, the subject was brought to his mind in a manner that startled him. He was in Galveston ordering supplies for the ranch, when in passing a shop which he would have called a draper's, but which was there designated as dealing in dry goods, he was amazed to see the name "Danby and Strong" in big letters at the bottom of a huge pile of small cardboard boxes that filled the whole window. At first the name merely struck him as familiar, and he came near asking himself "Where have I seen that before?" It was some

moments before he realised that the Strong stood for the man gazing stupidly in at the plate-glass window. Then he noticed that the boxes were all guaranteed to contain the famous Piccadilly collar. He read in a dazed manner a large printed bill which stood beside the pile of boxes. These collars it seemed, were warranted to be the genuine Danby and Strong collar, and the public was warned against imitations. They were asserted to be London made and linen faced, and the gratifying information was added that once a person wore the D. and S. collar he never afterwards relapsed into wearing any inferior brand. The price of each box was fifteen cents, or two boxes for a quarter. Strong found himself making a mental calculation which resulted in turning this notation into English money.

As he stood there a new interest began to fill his mind. Was the firm being carried on under the old name by some one else, or did this lot of collars represent part of the old stock? He had had no news from home since he left, and the bitter thought occurred to him that perhaps Danby had got somebody with capital to aid him in resuscitating the business. He resolved to go inside and get some information.

"You seem to have a very large stock of those collars on hand," he said to the man who was evidently the proprietor.

"Yes," was the answer. "You see, we are the State agents for this make. We supply the country dealers."

"Oh, do you? Is the firm of Danby and Strong still in existence? I understood it had suspended."

"I guess not," said the man. "They supply us all right enough. Still, I really know nothing about the firm, except that they turn out a first- class article. We're not in any way responsible for Danby and Strong; we're merely agents for the State of Texas, you know," the man added, with sudden caution.

"I have nothing against the firm," said Strong. "I asked because I once knew some members of it, and was wondering how it was getting along."

"Well, in that case you ought to see the American representative. He was here this week … that's why we make such a display in the window, it always pleases the agent … he's now working up the State and will be back in Galveston before the month is out."

"What's his name? Do you remember?"

"Danby. George Danby, I think. Here's his card. No, John Danby is the name. I thought it was George. Most Englishmen are George, you know."

Strong looked at the card, but the lettering seemed to waver before his eyes. He made out, however, that Mr. John Danby had an address in New York, and that he was the American representative of the firm of Danby and Strong, London. Strong placed the card on the counter before him.

"I used to know Mr. Danby, and I would like to meet him. Where do you think I could find him?"

"Well, as I said before, you could see him right here in Galveston if you wait a month, but if you are in a hurry you might catch him at Broncho Junction on Thursday night."

"He is travelling by rail then?"

"No, he is not. He went by rail as far as Felixopolis. There he takes a horse, and goes across the prairies to Broncho Junction; a three days' journey. I told him he wouldn't do much business on that route, but he said he was going partly for his health, and partly to see the country. He expected to reach Broncho Thursday night." The dry goods merchant laughed as one who suddenly remembers a pleasant circumstance. "You're an Englishman, I take it."

Strong nodded.

"Well, I must say you folks have queer notions about this country. Danby, who was going for a three days' journey across the plains, bought himself two Colts revolvers, and a knife half as long as my arm. Now I've travelled all over this State, and never carried a gun, but I couldn't get Danby to believe his route was as safe as a church. Of course, now and then in Texas a cowboy shoots off his gun, but it's more often his mouth, and I don't believe there's more killing done in Texas than in any other bit of land the same size. But you can't get an Englishman to believe that. You folks are an awful law-abiding crowd. For my part I would sooner stand my chance with a revolver than a lawsuit any day." Then the good-natured Texan told the story of the pistol in Texas; of the general lack of demand for it, but the great necessity of having it handy when it was called for.

A man with murder in his heart should not hold a conversation like this, but William Strong was too full of one idea to think of prudence. Such a talk sets the hounds of justice on the right trail, with unpleasant results for the criminal.

On Thursday morning Strong set out on horse-back from Broncho Junction with his face towards Felixopolis. By noon he said to himself he ought to meet his former partner with nothing but the horizon around them. Besides the revolvers in his belt, Strong had a Winchester rifle in front of him. He did not know but he might have to shoot at long range, and it was always well to prepare for eventualities. Twelve o'clock came, but he met no one, and there was nothing in sight around the empty circle of the horizon. It was nearly two before he saw a moving dot ahead of him. Danby was evidently unused to riding and had come leisurely. Some time before they met, Strong recognised his former partner and he got his rifle ready.

"Throw up your hands!" he shouted, bringing his rifle butt to his shoulder.

Danby instantly raised his hands above his head. "I have no money on me," he cried, evidently not recognising his opponent. "You may search me if you like."

"Get down off your horse; don't lower your hands, or I fire."

Danby got down, as well as he could, with his hands above his head. Strong had thrown his right leg over to the left side of the horse, and, as his enemy got down, he also slid to the ground, keeping Danby covered with the rifle.

"I assure you I have only a few dollars with me, which you are quite welcome to," said Danby.

Strong did not answer. Seeing that the firing was to be at short range, he took a six-shooter from his belt, and, cocking it, covered his man, throwing the rifle on the grass. He walked up to his enemy, placed the muzzle of the revolver against his rapidly beating heart, and leisurely disarmed him, throwing Danby's weapons on the ground out of reach. Then he stood back a few paces and looked at the trembling man. His face seemed to have already taken on the hue of death and his lips were bloodless.

"I see you recognise me at last, Mr. Danby. This is an unexpected meeting, is it not? You realise, I hope, that there are here no judges, juries, nor lawyers, no *mandamuses* and no appeals. Nothing but a writ of ejectment from the barrel of a

pistol and no legal way of staying the proceedings. In other words, no cursed quibbles and no damned law."

Danby, after several times moistening his pallid lips, found his voice.

"Do you mean to give me a chance, or are you going to murder me?"

"I am going to murder you."

Danby closed his eyes, let his hands drop to his sides, and swayed gently from side to side as a man does on the scaffold just before the bolt is drawn. Strong lowered his revolver and fired, shattering one knee of the doomed man. Danby dropped with a cry that was drowned by the second report. The second bullet put out his left eye, and the murdered man lay with his mutilated face turned up to the blue sky.

A revolver report on the prairies is short, sharp, and echoless. The silence that followed seemed intense and boundless, as if nowhere on earth there was such a thing as sound. The man on his back gave an awesome touch of the eternal to the stillness.

Strong, now that it was all over, began to realise his position. Texas, perhaps, paid too little heed to life lost in fair fight, but she had an uncomfortable habit of putting a rope round the neck of a cowardly murderer. Strong was an inventor by nature. He proceeded to invent his justification. He took one of Danby's revolvers and fired two shots out of it into the empty air. This would show that the dead man had defended himself at least, and it would be difficult to prove that he had not been the first to fire. He placed the other pistol and the knife in their places in Danby's belt. He took Danby's right hand while it was still warm and closed the fingers around the butt of the revolver from which he had fired, placing the forefinger on the trigger of the cocked six-shooter. To give effect and naturalness to the tableau he was arranging for the benefit of the next traveller by that trail, he drew up the right knee and put revolver and closed hand on it as if Danby had been killed while just about to fire his third shot.

Strong, with the pride of a true artist in his work, stepped back a pace or two for the purpose of seeing the effect of his work as a whole. As Danby fell, the back of his head had struck a lump of soil or a tuft of grass which threw the chin forward on the breast. As Strong looked at his victim his heart jumped, and a sort of hypnotic fear took possession of him and paralysed action at its source.

Danby was not yet dead. His right eye was open, and it glared at Strong with a malice and hatred that mesmerised the murderer and held him there, although he felt rather than knew he was covered by the cocked revolver he had placed in what he thought was a dead hand. Danby's lips moved but no sound came from them. Strong could not take his fascinated gaze from the open eye. He knew he was a dead man if Danby had strength to crook his finger, yet he could not take the leap that would bring him out of range. The fifth pistol-shot rang out and Strong pitched forward on his face.

The firm of Danby and Strong was dissolved.

A MODERN SAMSON.

A little more and Jean Rasteaux would have been a giant. Brittany men are small as a rule, but Jean was an exception. He was a powerful young fellow who, up to the time he was compelled to enter the army, had spent his life in dragging heavy nets over the sides of a boat. He knew the Brittany coast, rugged and indented as it is, as well as he knew the road from the little café on the square to the dwelling of his father on the hillside overlooking the sea. Never before had he been out of sound of the waves. He was a man who, like Hervé Riel, might have saved the fleet, but France, with the usual good sense of officialism, sent this man of the coast into the mountains, and Jean Rasteaux became a soldier in the Alpine Corps. If he stood on the highest mountain peak, Jean might look over illimitable wastes of snow, but he could catch neither sound nor sight of the sea.

Men who mix with mountains become as rough and rugged as the rocks, and the Alpine Corps was a wild body, harsh and brutal. Punishment in the ranks was swift and terrible, for the corps was situated far from any of the civilising things of modern life, and deeds were done which the world knew not of; deeds which would not have been approved if reported at headquarters.

The regiment of which Jean became a unit was stationed in a high valley that had but one outlet, a wild pass down which a mountain river roared and foamed and tossed. The narrow path by the side of this stream was the only way out of or into the valley, for all around, the little plateau was walled in by immense peaks of everlasting snow, dazzling in the sunlight, and luminous even in the still, dark nights. From the peaks to the south, Italy might have been seen, but no man had ever dared to climb any of them. The angry little river was fed from a glacier whose blue breast lay sparkling in the sunshine to the south, and the stream circumnavigated the enclosed plateau, as if trying to find an outlet for its tossing waters.

Jean was terribly lonely in these dreary and unaccustomed solitudes. The white

mountains awed him, and the mad roar of the river seemed but poor compensation for the dignified measured thunder of the waves on the broad sands of the Brittany coast.

But Jean was a good-natured giant, and he strove to do whatever was required of him. He was not quick at repartee, and the men mocked his Breton dialect. He became the butt for all their small and often mean jokes, and from the first he was very miserable, for, added to his yearning for the sea, whose steady roar he heard in his dreams at night, he felt the utter lack of all human sympathy.

At first he endeavoured, by unfailing good nature and prompt obedience, to win the regard of his fellows, and he became in a measure the slave of the regiment; but the more he tried to please the more his burden increased, and the greater were the insults he was compelled to bear from both officers and men. It was so easy to bully this giant, whom they nicknamed Samson, that even the smallest men in the regiment felt at liberty to swear at him or cuff him if necessary.

But at last Samson's good nature seemed to be wearing out. His stock was becoming exhausted, and his comrades forgot that the Bretons for hundreds of years have been successful fighters, and that the blood of contention flows in their veins.

Although the Alpine Corps, as a general thing, contain the largest and strongest men in the French Army, yet the average French soldier may be termed undersized when compared with the military of either England or Germany. There were several physically small men in the regiment, and one of these, like a diminutive gnat, was Samson's worst persecutor. As there was no other man in the regiment whom the gnat could bully, Samson received more than even he could be expected to bear. One day the gnat ordered Samson to bring him a pail of water from the stream, and the big man unhesitatingly obeyed. He spilled some of it coming up the bank, and when he delivered it to the little man, the latter abused him for not bringing the pail full, and as several of the larger soldiers, who had all in their turn made Samson miserable, were standing about, the little man picked up the pail of water and dashed it into Samson's face. It was such a good opportunity for showing off before the big men, who removed their pipes from their mouths and laughed loudly as Samson with his knuckles tried to take the water out of his eyes. Then Samson did an astonishing thing.

"You miserable, little insignificant rat," he cried. "I could crush you, but you are

not worth it. But to show you that I am not afraid of any of you, there, and there!"

As he said these two words with emphasis, he struck out from the shoulder, not at the little man, but at the two biggest men in the regiment, and felled them like logs to the ground.

A cry of rage went up from their comrades, but bullies are cowards at heart, and while Samson glared around at them, no one made a move.

The matter was reported to the officer, and Samson was placed under arrest. When the inquiry was held the officer expressed his astonishment at the fact that Samson hit two men who had nothing to do with the insult he had received, while the real culprit had been allowed to go unpunished.

"They deserved it," said Samson, sullenly, "for what they had done before. I could not strike the little man. I should have killed him."

"Silence!" cried the officer. "You must not answer me like that."

"I shall answer you as I like," said Samson, doggedly.

The officer sprang to his feet, with a lithe rattan cane in his hand, and struck the insubordinate soldier twice across the face, each time raising an angry red mark.

Before the guards had time to interfere, Samson sprang upon the officer, lifted him like a child above his head, and dashed him with a sickening crash to the ground, where he lay motionless.

A cry of horror went up from every one present.

"I have had enough," cried Samson, turning to go, but he was met by a bristling hedge of steel. He was like a rat in a trap. He stood defiantly there, a man maddened by oppression, and glared around helplessly.

Whatever might have been his punishment for striking his comrades, there was no doubt now about his fate. The guard-house was a rude hut of logs situated on the banks of the roaring stream. Into this room Samson was flung, bound hand and foot, to await the court-martial next day. The shattered officer, whose sword had broken in pieces under him, slowly revived and was carried to his quarters.

A sentry marched up and down all night before the guard-house.

In the morning, when Samson was sent for, the guard-house was found to be empty. The huge Breton had broken his bonds as did Samson of old. He had pushed out a log of wood from the wall, and had squeezed himself through to the bank of the stream. There all trace of him was lost. If he had fallen in, then of course he had sentenced and executed himself, but in the mud near the water were great footprints which no boot but that of Samson could have made; so if he were in the stream it must have been because he threw himself there. The trend of the footprints, however, indicated that he had climbed on the rocks, and there, of course, it was impossible to trace him. The sentries who guarded the pass maintained that no one had gone through during the night, but to make sure several men were sent down the path to overtake the runaway. Even if he reached a town or a village far below, so huge a man could not escape notice. The searchers were instructed to telegraph his description and his crime as soon as they reached a telegraph wire. It was impossible to hide in the valley, and a rapid search speedily convinced the officers that the delinquent was not there.

As the sun rose higher and higher, until it began to shine even on the northward-facing snow fields, a sharp-eyed private reported that he saw a black speck moving high up on the great white slope south of the valley. The officer called for a field-glass, and placing it to his eyes, examined the snow carefully.

"Call out a detachment," he said, "that is Samson on the mountain."

There was a great stir in the camp when the truth became known. Emissaries were sent after the searchers down the pass, calling them to return.

"He thinks to get to Italy," said the officer. "I did not imagine the fool knew so much of geography. We have him now secure enough."

The officer who had been flung over Samson's head was now able to hobble about, and he was exceedingly bitter. Shading his eyes and gazing at the snow, he said—

"A good marksman ought to be able to bring him down."

"There is no need of that," replied his superior. "He cannot escape. We have nothing to do but to wait for him. He will have to come down."

All of which was perfectly true.

A detachment crossed the stream and stacked its arms at the foot of the mountain which Samson was trying to climb. There was a small level place a few yards wide between the bottom of the hill and the bank of the raging stream. On this bit of level ground the soldiers lay in the sun and smoked, while the officers stood in a group and watched the climbing man going steadily upward.

For a short distance up from the plateau there was stunted grass and moss, with dark points of rock protruding from the scant soil. Above that again was a breadth of dirty snow which, now that the sun was strong, sent little trickling streams down to the river. From there to the long ridge of the mountain extended upwards the vast smooth slope of virgin snow, pure and white, sparkling in the strong sunlight as if it had been sprinkled with diamond dust. A black speck against this tremendous field of white, the giant struggled on, and they could see by the glass that he sunk to the knee in the softening snow.

"Now," said the officer, "he is beginning to understand his situation."

Through the glass they saw Samson pause. From below it seemed as if the snow were as smooth as a sloping roof, but even to the naked eye a shadow crossed it near the top. That shadow was a tremendous ridge of overhanging snow more than a hundred feet deep; and Samson now paused as he realised that it was insurmountable. He looked down and undoubtedly saw a part of the regiment waiting for him below. He turned and plodded slowly under the overhanging ridge until he came to the precipice at his left. It was a thousand feet sheer down. He retraced his steps and walked to the similar precipice at the right. Then he came again to the middle of the great T which his footmarks had made on that virgin slope. He sat down in the snow.

No one will ever know what a moment of despair the Breton must have passed through when he realised the hopelessness of his toil.

The officer who was gazing through the glass at him dropped his hand to his side and laughed.

"The nature of the situation," he said, "has at last dawned upon him.
It took a long time to get an appreciation of it through his thick
Breton skull."

"Let me have the glass a moment," said another. "He has made up his mind about something."

The officer did not realise the full significance of what he saw through the glass. In spite of their conceit, their skulls were thicker than that of the persecuted Breton fisherman.

Samson for a moment turned his face to the north and raised his face towards heaven. Whether it was an appeal to the saints he believed in, or an invocation to the distant ocean he was never more to look upon, who can tell?

After a moment's pause he flung himself headlong down the slope towards the section of the regiment which lounged on the bank of the river. Over and over he rolled, and then in place of the black figure there came downwards a white ball, gathering bulk at every bound.

It was several seconds before the significance of what they were gazing at burst upon officers and men. It came upon them simultaneously, and with it a wild panic of fear. In the still air a low sullen roar arose.

"An avalanche! An avalanche!!" they cried.

The men and officers were hemmed in by the boiling torrent. Some of them plunged in to get to the other side, but the moment the water laid hold of them their heels were whirled into the air, and they disappeared helplessly down the rapids.

Samson was hours going up the mountain, but only seconds coming down. Like an overwhelming wave came the white crest of the avalanche, sweeping officers and men into and over the stream and far across the plateau.

There was one mingled shriek which made itself heard through the sullen roar of the snow, then all was silence. The hemmed-in waters rose high and soon forced its way through the white barrier.

When the remainder of the regiment dug out from the débris the bodies of their comrades they found a fixed look of the wildest terror on every face except one. Samson himself, without an unbroken bone in his body, slept as calmly as if he rested under the blue waters on the coast of Brittany.

A DEAL ON 'CHANGE

It was in the days when drawing-rooms were dark, and filled with bric- a-brac. The darkness enabled the half-blinded visitor, coming in out of the bright light, to knock over gracefully a $200 vase that had come from Japan to meet disaster in New York.

In a corner of the room was seated, in a deep and luxurious armchair, a most beautiful woman. She was the wife of the son of the richest man in America; she was young; her husband was devotedly fond of her; she was mistress of a palace; anything that money could buy was hers did she but express the wish; but she was weeping softly, and had just made up her mind that she was the most miserable creature in all the land.

If a stranger had entered the room he would first have been impressed by the fact that he was looking at the prettiest woman he had ever seen; then he would have been haunted by the idea that he had met her somewhere before. If he were a man moving in artistic circles he might perhaps remember that he had seen her face looking down at him from various canvases in picture exhibitions, and unless he were a stranger to the gossip of the country he could hardly help recollecting the dreadful fuss the papers made, as if it were any business of theirs, when young Ed. Druce married the artists' model, celebrated for her loveliness.

Every one has read the story of that marriage; goodness knows, the papers made the most of it, as is their custom. Young Ed., who knew much more of the world than did his father, expected stern opposition, and, knowing the unlimited power unlimited wealth gave to the old man, he did not risk an interview with his parent, but eloped with the girl. The first inkling old man Druce had of the affair was from a vivid sensational account of the runaway in an evening paper. He was pictured in the paper as an implacable father who was at that moment searching for the elopers with a shot gun. Old Druce had been too often the

central figure of a journalistic sensation to mind what the sheet said. He promptly telegraphed all over the country, and, getting into communication with his son, asked him (electrically) as a favour to bring his young wife home, and not make a fool of himself. So the errant pair, much relieved, came back to New York.

Old Druce was a taciturn man, even with his only son. He wondered at first that the boy should have so misjudged him as to suppose he would raise objections, no matter whom the lad wished to marry. He was bewildered rather than enlightened when Ed. told him he feared opposition because the girl was poor. What difference on earth did *that* make? Had he not money enough for all of them? If not, was there any trouble in adding to their store? Were there not railroads to be wrecked; stockholders to be fleeced; Wall Street lambs to be shorn? Surely a man married to please himself and not to make money. Ed. assured the old man that cases had been known where a suspicion of mercenary motives had hovered round a matrimonial alliance, but Druce expressed the utmost contempt for such a state of things.

At first Ella had been rather afraid of her silent father-in-law, whose very name made hundreds tremble and thousands curse, but she soon discovered that the old man actually stood in awe of her, and that his apparent brusqueness was the mere awkwardness he felt when in her presence. He was anxious to please her, and worried himself wondering whether there was anything she wanted.

One day he fumblingly dropped a cheque for a million dollars in her lap, and, with some nervous confusion, asked her to run out, like a good girl, and buy herself something; if that wasn't enough, she was to call on him for more. The girl sprang from her chair and threw her arms around his neck, much to the old man's embarrassment, who was not accustomed to such a situation. She kissed him in spite of himself, allowing the cheque to flutter to the floor, the most valuable bit of paper floating around loose in America that day.

When he reached his office he surprised his son. He shook his fist in the young fellow's face, and said sternly—

"If you ever say a cross word to that little girl, I'll do what I've never done yet—I'll thrash you!"

The young man laughed.

"All right, father. I'll deserve a thrashing in that case."

The old man became almost genial whenever he thought of his pretty daughter-in-law. "My little girl," he always called her. At first, Wall Street men said old Druce was getting into his dotage, but when a nip came in the market and they found that, as usual, the old man was on the right side of the fence, they were compelled reluctantly to admit, with emptier pockets, that the dotage had not yet interfered with the financial corner of old Druce's mind.

As young Mrs. Druce sat disconsolately in her drawing-room, the curtains parted gently, and her father-in-law entered stealthily, as if he were a thief, which indeed he was, and the very greatest of them. Druce had small, shifty piercing eyes that peered out from under his grey bushy eyebrows like two steel sparks. He never seemed to be looking directly at any one, and his eyes somehow gave you the idea that they were trying to glance back over his shoulder, as if he feared pursuit. Some said that old Druce was in constant terror of assassination, while others held that he knew the devil was on his track and would ultimately nab him.

"I pity the devil when that day comes," young Sneed said once when some one had made the usual remark about Druce. This echoed the general feeling prevalent in Wall Street regarding the encounter that was admitted by all to be inevitable.

The old man stopped in the middle of the room when he noticed that his daughter-in-law was crying.

"Dear, dear!" he said; "what is the matter? Has Edward been saying anything cross to you?"

"No, papa," answered the girl. "Nobody could be kinder to me than Ed. is. There is nothing really the matter." Then, to put the truth of her statement beyond all question, she began to cry afresh.

The old man sat down beside her, taking one hand in his own. "Money?" he asked in an eager whisper that seemed to say he saw a solution of the difficulty if it were financial.

"Oh dear no. I have all the money, and more, that anyone can wish."

The old man's countenance fell. If money would not remedy the state of things, then he was out of his depth.

"Won't you tell me the trouble? Perhaps I can suggest——"

"It's nothing you can help in, papa. It is nothing much, any way. The Misses Sneed won't call on me, that's all."

The old man knit his brows and thoughtfully scratched his chin.

"Won't call?" he echoed helplessly.

"No. They think I'm not good enough to associate with them, I suppose."

The bushy eyebrows came down until they almost obscured the eyes, and a dangerous light seemed to scintillate out from under them.

"You must be mistaken. Good gracious, I am worth ten times what old Sneed is. Not good enough? Why, my name on a cheque is——"

"It isn't a question of cheques, papa," wailed the girl; "it's a question of society. I was a painter's model before I married Ed., and, no matter how rich I am, society won't have anything to do with me."

The old man absent-mindedly rubbed his chin, which was a habit he had when perplexed. He was face to face with a problem entirely outside his province. Suddenly a happy thought struck him.

"Those Sneed women!" he said in tones of great contempt, "what do *they* amount to, anyhow? They're nothing but sour old maids. They never were half so pretty as you. Why should you care whether they called on you or not."

"They represent society. If they came, others would."

"But society can't have anything against you. Nobody has ever said a word against your character, model or no model."

The girl shook her head hopelessly.

"Character does not count in society."

In this statement she was of course absurdly wrong, but she felt bitter at all the world. Those who know society are well aware that character counts for everything within its sacred precincts. So the unjust remark should not be set down to the discredit of an inexperienced girl.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," cried the old man, brightening up. "I'll speak to Gen. Sneed to-morrow. I'll arrange the whole business in five minutes."

"Do you think that would do any good?" asked young Mrs. Druce, dubiously.

"Good? You bet it'll do good! It will settle the whole thing. I've helped Sneed out of a pinch before now, and he'll fix up a little matter like that for me in no time. I'll just have a quiet talk with the General to-morrow, and you'll see the Sneed carriage at the door next day at the very latest." He patted her smooth white hand affectionately. "So don't you trouble, little girl, about trifles; and whenever you want help, you just tell the old man. He knows a thing or two yet, whether it is on Wall Street or Fifth Avenue."

Sneed was known in New York as the General, probably because he had absolutely no military experience whatever. Next to Druce he had the most power in the financial world of America, but there was a great distance between the first and the second. If it came to a deal in which the General and all the world stood against Druce, the average Wall Street man would have bet on Druce against the whole combination. Besides this, the General had the reputation of being a "square" man, and that naturally told against him, for every one knew that Druce was utterly unscrupulous. But if Druce and Sneed were known to be together in a deal, then the financial world of New York ran for shelter. Therefore when New York saw old Druce come in with the stealthy tread of a two-legged leopard and glance furtively around the great room, singling out Sneed with an almost imperceptible side nod, retiring with him into a remote corner where more ruin had been concocted than on any other spot on earth, and talking there eagerly with him, a hush fell on the vast assemblage of men, and for the moment the financial heart of the nation ceased to beat. When they saw Sneed take out his note-book, nodding assent to whatever proposition Druce was making, a cold shiver ran up the financial backbone of New York; the shiver communicated itself to the electric nerve-web of the world, and storm signals began to fly in the monetary centres of London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna.

Uncertainty paralysed the markets of the earth because two old gamblers were

holding a whispered conversation with a multitude of men watching them out of the corners of their eyes.

"I'd give half a million to know what those two old fiends are concocting," said John P. Buller, the great wheat operator; and he meant it; which goes to show that a man does not really know what he wants, and would be very dissatisfied if he got it.

"Look here, General," said Druce, "I want you to do me a favour."

"All right," replied the General. "I'm with you."

"It's about my little girl," continued Druce, rubbing his chin, not knowing just how to explain matters in the cold financial atmosphere of the place in which they found themselves.

"Oh! About Ed.'s wife," said Sneed, looking puzzled.

"Yes. She's fretting her heart out because your two girls won't call upon her. I found her crying about it yesterday afternoon."

"Won't call?" cried the General, a bewildered look coming over his face. "*Haven't* they called yet? You see, I don't bother much about that sort of thing."

"Neither do I. No, they haven't called. I don't suppose they mean anything by it, but my little girl thinks they do, so I said I would speak to you about it."

"Well, I'm glad you did. I'll see to that the moment I get home. What time shall I tell them to call?" The innocent old man, little comprehending what he was promising, pulled out his note-book and pencil, looking inquiringly at Druce.

"Oh, I don't know. Any time that is convenient for them. I suppose women know all about that. My little girl is at home most all afternoon, I guess."

The two men cordially shook hands, and the market instantly collapsed.

It took three days for the financial situation to recover its tone. Druce had not been visible, and that was all the more ominous. The older operators did not relax their caution, because the blow had not yet fallen. They shook their heads, and said the cyclone would be all the worse when it came.

Old Druce came among them the third day, and there was a set look about his lips which students of his countenance did not like. The situation was complicated by the evident fact that the General was trying to avoid him. At last, however, this was no longer possible, the two men met, and after a word or two they walked up and down together. Druce appeared to be saying little, and the firm set of his lips did not relax, while the General talked rapidly and was seemingly making some appeal that was not responded to. Stocks instantly went up a few points.

"You see, Druce, it's like this," the General was saying, "the women have their world, and we have ours. They are, in a measure——"

"Are they going to call?" asked Druce curtly.

"Just let me finish what I was about to say. Women have their rules of conduct, and we have——"

"Are they going to call?" repeated Druce, in the same hard tone of voice.

The General removed his hat and drew his handkerchief across his brow and over the bald spot on his head. He wished himself in any place but where he was, inwardly cursing woman-kind and all their silly doings. Bracing up after removing the moisture from his forehead, he took on an expostulatory tone.

"See here, Druce, hang it all, don't shove a man into a corner. Suppose I asked you to go to Mrs. Ed. and tell her not to fret about trifles, do you suppose she wouldn't, just because you wanted her not to? Come now!"

Druce's silence encouraged the General to take it for assent.

"Very well, then. You're a bigger man than I am, and if you could do nothing with one young woman anxious to please you, what do you expect me to do with two old maids as set in their ways as the Palisades. It's all dumb nonsense, anyhow."

Druce remained silent. After an irksome pause the hapless General floundered on—

"As I said at first, women have their world, and we have ours. Now, Druce, you're a man of solid common sense. What would you think if Mrs. Ed. were to

come here and insist on your buying Wabash stock when you wanted to load up with Lake Shore? Look how absurd that would be. Very well, then; we have no more right to interfere with the women than they have to interfere with us."

"If my little girl wanted the whole Wabash System I'd buy it for her to-morrow," said Druce, with rising anger.

"Lord! what a slump that would make in the market!" cried the General, his feeling of discomfort being momentarily overcome by the magnificence of Druce's suggestion. "However, all this doesn't need to make any difference in our friendship. If I can be of any assistance financially I shall only be too——"

"Oh, I need your financial assistance!" sneered Druce. He took his defeat badly. However, in a minute or two, he pulled himself together and seemed to shake off his trouble.

"What nonsense I am talking," he said when he had obtained control of himself. "We all need assistance now and then, and none of us know when we may need it badly. In fact, there is a little deal I intended to speak to you about to-day, but this confounded business drove it out of my mind. How much Gilt Edged security have you in your safe?"

"About three millions' worth," replied the General, brightening up, now that they were off the thin ice.

"That will be enough for me if we can make a dicker. Suppose we adjourn to your office. This is too public a place for a talk."

They went out together.

"So there is no ill-feeling?" said the General, as Druce arose to go with the securities in his handbag.

"No. But we'll stick strictly to business after this, and leave social questions alone. By the way, to show that there is no ill-feeling, will you come with me for a blow on the sea? Suppose we say Friday. I have just telegraphed for my yacht, and she will leave Newport to-night. I'll have some good champagne on board."

"I thought sailors imagined Friday was an unlucky day!"

"My sailors don't. Will eight o'clock be too early for you? Twenty- third Street wharf."

The General hesitated. Druce was wonderfully friendly all of a sudden, and he knew enough of him to be just a trifle suspicious. But when he recollected that Druce himself was going, he said, "Where could a telegram reach us, if it were necessary to telegraph? The market is a trifle shaky, and I don't like being out of town all day."

"The fact that we are both on the yacht will steady the market. But we can drop in at Long Branch and receive despatches if you think it necessary."

"All right," said the General, much relieved. "I'll meet you at Twenty- third Street at eight o'clock Friday morning, then."

Druce's yacht, the *Seahound*, was a magnificent steamer, almost as large as an Atlantic liner. It was currently believed in New York that Druce kept her for the sole purpose of being able to escape in her, should an exasperated country ever rise in its might and demand his blood. It was rumoured that the *Seahound* was ballasted with bars of solid gold and provisioned for a two years' cruise. Mr. Buller, however, claimed that the tendency of nature was to revert to original conditions, and that some fine morning Druce would hoist the black flag, sail away, and become a *real* pirate.

The great speculator, in a very nautical suit, was waiting for the General when he drove up, and, the moment he came aboard, lines were cast off and the Seahound steamed slowly down the bay. The morning was rather thick, so they were obliged to move cautiously, and before they reached the bar the fog came down so densely that they had to stop, while bell rang and whistle blew. They were held there until it was nearly eleven o'clock, but time passed quickly, for there were all the morning papers to read, neither of the men having had an opportunity to look at them before leaving the city.

As the fog cleared away and the engines began to move, the captain sent down and asked Mr. Druce if he would come on deck for a moment. The captain was a shrewd man, and understood his employer.

"There's a tug making for us, sir, signalling us to stop. Shall we stop?"

Old Druce rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and looked over the stern of the yacht.

He saw a tug, with a banner of black smoke, tearing after them, heaping up a ridge of white foam ahead of her. Some flags fluttered from the single mast in front, and she shattered the air with short hoarse shrieks of the whistle.

"Can she overtake us?"

The captain smiled. "Nothing in the harbour can overtake us, sir."

"Very well. Full steam ahead. Don't answer the signals. You did not happen to see them, you know!"

"Quite so, sir," replied the captain, going forward.

Although the motion of the *Seahound's* engines could hardly be felt, the tug, in spite of all her efforts, did not seem to be gaining. When the yacht put on her speed the little steamer gradually fell farther and farther behind, and at last gave up the hopeless chase. When well out at sea something went wrong with the engines, and there was a second delay of some hours. A stop at Long Branch was therefore out of the question.

"I told you Friday was an unlucky day," said the General.

It was eight o'clock that evening before the *Seahound* stood off from the Twenty-third Street wharf.

"I'll have to put you ashore in a small boat," said Druce: "you won't mind that, I hope. The captain is so uncertain about the engines that he doesn't want to go nearer land."

"Oh, I don't mind in the least. Good-night. I've had a lovely day."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. We will take another trip together some time, when I hope so many things won't happen as happened to-day."

The General saw that his carriage was waiting for him, but the waning light did not permit him to recognise his son until he was up on dry land once more. The look on his son's face appalled the old man.

"My God! John, what has happened?"

[Illustration: "WHAT HAS HAPPENED?"]

"Everything's happened. Where are the securities that were in the safe?"

"Oh, they're all right," said his father, a feeling of relief coming over him. Then the thought flashed through his mind: How did John know they were not in the safe? Sneed kept a tight rein on his affairs, and no one but himself knew the combination that would open the safe.

"How did you know that the securities were not there?"

"Because I had the safe blown open at one o'clock to-day."

"Blown open! For Heaven's sake, why?"

"Step into the carriage, and I'll tell you on the way home. The bottom dropped out of everything. All the Sneed stocks went down with a run. We sent a tug after you, but that old devil had you tight. If I could have got at the bonds, I think I could have stopped the run. The situation might have been saved up to one o'clock, but after that, when the Street saw we were doing nothing, all creation couldn't have stopped it. Where are the bonds?"

"I sold them to Druce."

"What did you get? Cash?"

"I took his cheque on the Trust National Bank."

"Did you cash it? Did you cash it?" cried the young man. "And if you did, where is the money?"

"Druce asked me as a favour not to present the cheque until to-morrow."

The young man made a gesture of despair.

"The Trust National went to smash to-day at two. We are paupers, father; we haven't a cent left out of the wreck. That cheque business is so evidently a fraud that—but what's the use of talking. Old Druce has the money, and he can buy all the law he wants in New York. God! I'd like to have a seven seconds' interview with him with a loaded seven-shooter in my hand! We'd see how much the law

would do for him then."

General Sneed despondently shook his head.

"It's no use, John," he said. "We're in the same business ourselves, only this time we got the hot end of the poker. But he played it low down on me, pretending to be friendly and all that." The two men did not speak again until the carriage drew up at the brown stone mansion, which earlier in the day Sneed would have called his own. Sixteen reporters were waiting for them, but the old man succeeded in escaping to his room, leaving John to battle with the newspaper men.

Next morning the papers were full of the news of the panic. They said that old Druce had gone in his yacht for a trip up the New England coast. They deduced from this fact, that, after all, Druce might not have had a hand in the disaster; everything was always blamed on Druce. Still it was admitted that, whoever suffered, the Druce stocks were all right. They were quite unanimously frank in saying that the Sneeds were wiped out, whatever that might mean. The General had refused himself to all the reporters, while young Sneed seemed to be able to do nothing but swear.

Shortly before noon General Sneed, who had not left the house, received a letter brought by a messenger.

He feverishly tore it open, for he recognised on the envelope the well- known scrawl of the great speculator.

DEAR SNEED (it ran),

You will see by the papers that I am off on a cruise, but they are as wrong as they usually are when they speak of me. I learn there was a bit of a flutter in the market while we were away yesterday, and I am glad to say that my brokers, who are sharp men, did me a good turn or two. I often wonder why these flurries come, but I suppose it is to let a man pick up some sound stocks at a reasonable rate, if he has the money by him. Perhaps they are also sent to teach humility to those who might else become purse-proud. We are but finite creatures, Sneed, here to-day and gone to-morrow. How foolish a thing is pride! And that reminds me that if your two daughters should happen to think as I do on the uncertainty of riches, I wish you would ask them to call. I have done up those securities in a sealed package and given the parcel to my daughter-in-law. She has no idea what the value of it is, but thinks it a little present from me to your girls. If, then, they

should happen to call, she will hand it to them; if not, I shall use the contents to found a college for the purpose of teaching manners to young women whose grandfather used to feed pigs for a living, as indeed my own grandfather did. Should the ladies happen to like each other, I think I can put you on to a deal next week that will make up for Friday. I like you, Sneed, but you have no head for business. Seek my advice oftener.

Ever yours,
DRUCE.

The Sneed girls called on Mrs. Edward Druce.

TRANSFORMATION.

If you grind castor sugar with an equal quantity of chlorate of potash, the result is an innocent-looking white compound, sweet to the taste, and sometimes beneficial in the case of a sore throat. But if you dip a glass rod into a small quantity of sulphuric acid, and merely touch the harmless-appearing mixture with the wet end of the rod, the dish which contains it becomes instantly a roaring furnace of fire, vomiting forth a fountain of burning balls, and filling the room with a dense, black, suffocating cloud of smoke.

So strange a combination is that mystery which we term Human Nature, that a touch of adverse circumstance may transform a quiet, peaceable, law-abiding citizen into a malefactor whose heart is filled with a desire for vengeance, stopping at nothing to accomplish it.

In a little narrow street off the broad Rue de Rennes, near the great terminus of Mont-Parnasse, stood the clock-making shop of the brothers Delore. The window was filled with cheap clocks, and depending from a steel spring attached to the top of the door was a bell, which rang when any one entered, for the brothers were working clockmakers, continually busy in the room at the back of the shop, and trade in the neighbourhood was not brisk enough to allow them to keep an assistant. The brothers had worked amicably in this small room for twenty years, and were reported by the denizens of that quarter of Paris to be enormously rich. They were certainly contented enough, and had plenty of money for their frugal wants, as well as for their occasional exceedingly mild dissipations at the neighbouring café. They had always a little money for the church, and a little money for charity, and no one had ever heard either of them speak a harsh word to any living soul, and least of all to each other. When the sensitively adjusted bell at the door announced the arrival of a possible customer, Adolph left his work and attended to the shop, while Alphonse continued his task without interruption. The former was supposed to be the better business man of the two, while the latter was admittedly the better workman. They had a

room over the shop, and a small kitchen over the workroom at the back; but only one occupied the bedroom above, the other sleeping in the shop, as it was supposed that the wares there displayed must have formed an almost irresistible temptation to any thief desirous of accumulating a quantity of time-pieces. The brothers took week-about at guarding the treasures below, but in all the twenty years no thief had yet disturbed their slumbers.

One evening, just as they were about to close the shop and adjourn together to the café, the bell rang, and Adolph went forward to learn what was wanted. He found waiting for him an unkempt individual of appearance so disreputable, that he at once made up his mind that here at last was the thief for whom they had waited so long in vain. The man's wild, roving eye, that seemed to search out every corner and cranny in the place and rest nowhere for longer than a second at a time, added to Delore's suspicions. The unsavoury visitor was evidently spying out the land, and Adolph felt certain he would do no business with him at that particular hour, whatever might happen later.

The customer took from under his coat, after a furtive glance at the door of the back room, a small paper-covered parcel, and, untying the string somewhat hurriedly, displayed a crude piece of clockwork made of brass. Handing it to Adolph, he said, "How much would it cost to make a dozen like that?"

Adolph took the piece of machinery in his hand and examined it. It was slightly concave in shape, and among the wheels was a strong spring. Adolph wound up this spring, but so loosely was the machinery put together that when he let go the key, the spring quickly uncoiled itself with a whirring noise of the wheels.

"This is very bad workmanship," said Adolph.

"It is," replied the man, who, notwithstanding his poverty-stricken appearance, spoke like a person of education. "That is why I come to you for better workmanship."

"What is it used for?"

The man hesitated for a moment. "It is part of a clock," he said at last.

"I don't understand it. I never saw a clock made like this."

"It is an alarm attachment," replied the visitor, with some impatience. "It is not

necessary that you should understand it. All I ask is, can you duplicate it and at what price?"

"But why not make the alarm machinery part of the clock? It would be much cheaper than to make this and then attach it to a clock."

The man made a gesture of annoyance.

"Will you answer my question?" he said gruffly.

"I don't believe you want this as part of a clock. In fact, I think I can guess why you came in here," replied Adolph, as innocent as a child of any correct suspicion of what the man was, thinking him merely a thief, and hoping to frighten him by this hint of his own shrewdness.

His visitor looked loweringly at him, and then with a quick eye, seemed to measure the distance from where he stood to the pavement, evidently meditating flight.

"I will see what my brother says about this," said Adolph. But before Adolph could call his brother, the man bolted and was gone in an instant, leaving the mechanism in the hands of the bewildered clockmaker.

Alphonse, when he heard the story of their belated customer, was even more convinced than his brother of the danger of the situation. The man was undoubtedly a thief, and the bit of clockwork merely an excuse for getting inside the fortress. The brothers, with much perturbation, locked up the establishment, and instead of going to their usual café, they betook themselves as speedily as possible to the office of the police, where they told their suspicions and gave a description of the supposed culprit. The officer seemed much impressed by their story.

"Have you brought with you the machine he showed you?"

"No. It is at the shop," said Adolph. "It was merely an excuse to get inside, I am sure of that, for no clockmaker ever made it."

"Perhaps," replied the officer. "Will you go and bring it? Say nothing of this to any one you meet, but wrap the machine in paper and bring it as quickly and as quietly as you can. I would send a man with you, only I do not wish to attract

attention."

Before morning the man, who gave his name as Jacques Picard, was arrested, but the authorities made little by their zeal. Adolph Delore swore positively that Picard and his visitor were the same person, but the prisoner had no difficulty in proving that he was in a café two miles away at the time the visitor was in Delore's shop, while Adolph had to admit that the shop was rather dark when the conversation about the clockwork took place. Picard was ably defended, and his advocate submitted that, even if he had been in the shop as stated by Delore, and had bargained as alleged for the mechanism, there was nothing criminal in that, unless the prosecution could show that he intended to put what he bought to improper uses. As well arrest a man who entered to buy a key for his watch. So Picard was released, although the police, certain he was one of the men they wanted, resolved to keep a close watch on his future movements. But the suspected man, as if to save them unnecessary trouble, left two days later for London, and there remained.

For a week Adolph slept badly in the shop, for although he hoped the thief had been frightened away by the proceedings taken against him, still, whenever he fell asleep, he dreamt of burglars, and so awoke himself many times during the long nights.

When it came the turn of Alphonse to sleep in the shop, Adolph hoped for an undisturbed night's rest in the room above, but the Fates were against him. Shortly after midnight he was flung from his bed to the floor, and he felt the house rocking as if an earthquake had passed under Paris. He got on his hands and knees in a dazed condition, with a roar as of thunder in his ears, mingled with the sharp crackle of breaking glass. He made his way to the window, wondering whether he was asleep or awake, and found the window shattered. The moonlight poured into the deserted street, and he noticed a cloud of dust and smoke rising from the front of the shop. He groped his way through the darkness towards the stairway and went down, calling his brother's name; but the lower part of the stair had been blown away, and he fell upon the débris below, lying there half- stunned, enveloped in suffocating smoke.

When Adolph partially recovered consciousness, he became aware that two men were helping him out over the ruins of the shattered shop. He was still murmuring the name of his brother, and they were telling him, in a reassuring tone, that everything was all right, although he vaguely felt that what they said

was not true. They had their arms linked in his, and he stumbled helplessly among the wreckage, seeming to have lost control over his limbs. He saw that the whole front of the shop was gone, and noticed through the wide opening that a crowd stood in the street, kept back by the police. He wondered why he had not seen all these people when he looked out of the shattered window. When they brought him to the ambulance, he resisted slightly, saying he wanted to go to his brother's assistance, who was sleeping in the shop, but with gentle force they placed him in the vehicle, and he was driven away to the hospital.

For several days Adolph fancied that he was dreaming, that he would soon awake and take up again the old pleasant, industrious life. It was the nurse who told him he would never see his brother again, adding by way of consolation that death had been painless and instant, that the funeral had been one of the grandest that quarter of Paris had ever seen, naming many high and important officials who had attended it. Adolph turned his face to the wall and groaned. His frightful dream was to last him his life.

When he trod the streets of Paris a week later, he was but the shadow of his former portly self. He was gaunt and haggard, his clothes hanging on him as if they had been made for some other man, a fortnight's stubby beard on the face which had always heretofore been smoothly shaven. He sat silently at the café, and few of his friends recognised him at first. They heard he had received ample compensation from the Government, and now would have money enough to suffice him all his life, without the necessity of working for it, and they looked on him as a fortunate man. But he sat there listlessly, receiving their congratulations or condolences with equal apathy. Once he walked past the shop. The front was boarded up, and glass had been put in the upper windows.

He wandered aimlessly through the streets of Paris, some saying he was insane, and that he was looking for his brother; others, that he was searching for the murderer. One day he entered the police-office where he had first made his unlucky complaint.

"Have you arrested him yet?" he asked of the officer in charge.

"Whom?" inquired the officer, not recognising his visitor.

"Picard. I am Adolph Delore."

"It was not Picard who committed the crime. He was in London at the time, and

is there still."

"Ah! He said he was in the north of Paris when he was with me in the south. He is a liar. He blew up the shop."

"I quite believe he planned it, but the deed was done by another. It was done by Lamoine, who left for Brussels next morning and went to London by way of Antwerp. He is living with Picard in London at this moment."

"If you know that, why has neither of them been taken?"

"To know is one thing; to be able to prove quite another. We cannot get these rascals from England merely on suspicion, and they will take good care not to set foot in France for some time to come."

"You are waiting for evidence, then?"

"We are waiting for evidence."

"How do you expect to get it?"

"We are having them watched. They are very quiet just now, but it won't be for long. Picard is too restless. Then we may arrest some one soon who will confess."

"Perhaps I could help. I am going to London. Will you give me Picard's address?"

"Here is his address, but I think you had better leave the case alone. You do not know the language, and you may merely arouse his suspicions if you interfere. Still, if you learn anything, communicate with me."

The former frank, honest expression in Adolph's eyes had given place to a look of cunning, that appealed to the instincts of a French police- officer. He thought something might come of this, and his instincts did not mislead him.

Delore with great craftiness watched the door of the house in London, taking care that no one should suspect his purpose. He saw Picard come out alone on several occasions, and once with another of his own stripe, whom he took to be Lamoine.

One evening, when crossing Leicester Square, Picard was accosted by a stranger in his own language. Looking round with a start, he saw at his side a cringing tramp, worse than shabbily dressed.

"What did you say?" asked Picard, with a tremor in his voice.

"Could you assist a poor countryman?" whined Delore.

"I have no money."

"Perhaps you could help me to get work. I don't know the language, but I am a good workman."

"How can I help you to work? I have no work myself."

"I would be willing to work for nothing, if I could get a place to sleep in and something to eat."

"Why don't you steal? I would if I were hungry. What are you afraid of? Prison? It is no worse than tramping the streets hungry; I know, for I have tried both. What is your trade?"

"I am a watchmaker and a first-class workman, but I have pawned all my tools. I have tramped from Lyons, but there is nothing doing in my trade."

Picard looked at him suspiciously for a few moments.

"Why did you accost me?" he asked at last.

"I saw you were a fellow-countryman; Frenchmen have helped me from time to time."

"Let us sit down on this bench. What is your name, and how long have you been in England?"

"My name is Adolph Carrier, and I have been in London three months."

"So long as that? How have you lived all that time?"

"Very poorly, as you may see. I sometimes get scraps from the French restaurants, and I sleep where I can."

"Well, I think I can do better than that for you. Come with me."

Picard took Delore to his house, letting himself in with a latchkey. Nobody seemed to occupy the place but himself and Lamoine. He led the way to the top story, and opened a door that communicated with a room entirely bare of furniture. Leaving Adolph there, Picard went downstairs again and came up shortly after with a lighted candle in his hand, followed by Lamoine, who carried a mattress.

"This will do for you for tonight," said Picard, "and tomorrow we will see if we can get you any work. Can you make clocks?"

"Oh yes, and good ones."

"Very well. Give me a list of the tools and materials you need and I will get them for you."

Picard wrote in a note-book the items Adolph recited to him, Lamoine watching their new employee closely, but saying nothing. Next day a table and a chair were put into the room, and in the afternoon Picard brought in the tools and some sheets of brass.

Picard and Lamoine were somewhat suspicious of their recruit at first, but he went on industriously with his task, and made no attempt to communicate with anybody. They soon saw that he was an expert workman, and a quiet, innocent, half-daft, harmless creature, so he was given other things to do, such as cleaning up their rooms and going errands for beer and other necessities of life.

When Adolph finished his first machine, he took it down to them and exhibited it with pardonable pride. There was a dial on it exactly like a clock, although it had but one hand.

"Let us see it work," said Picard; "set it so that the bell will ring in three minutes."

Adolph did as requested, and stood back when the machine began to work with a scarcely audible tick-tick. Picard pulled out his watch, and exactly at the third minute the hammer fell on the bell. "That is very satisfactory," said Picard; "now, can you make the next one slightly concave, so that a man may strap it under his coat without attracting attention? Such a shape is useful when passing the Customs."

"I can make it any shape you like, and thinner than this one if you wish it."

"Very well. Go out and get us a quart of beer, and we will drink to your success. Here is the money."

Adolph obeyed with his usual docility, staying out, however, somewhat longer than usual. Picard, impatient at the delay, spoke roughly to him when he returned, and ordered him to go upstairs to his work. Adolph departed meekly, leaving them to their beer.

"See that you understand that machine, Lamoine," said Picard. "Set it at half an hour."

Lamoine, turning the hand to the figure VI on the dial, set the works in motion, and to the accompaniment of its quiet tick-tick they drank their beer.

"He seems to understand his business," said Lamoine.

"Yes," answered Picard. "What heady stuff this English beer is. I wish we had some good French bock; this makes me drowsy."

Lamoine did not answer; he was nodding in his chair. Picard threw himself down on his mattress in one corner of the room; Lamoine, when he slipped from his chair, muttered an oath, and lay where he fell.

Twenty minutes later the door stealthily opened, and Adolph's head cautiously reconnoitred the situation, coming into the silent apartment inch by inch, his crafty eyes rapidly searching the room and filling with malicious glee when he saw that everything was as he had planned. He entered quietly and closed the door softly behind him. He had a great coil of thin strong cord in his hand. Approaching the sleeping men on tiptoe, he looked down on them for a moment, wondering whether the drug had done its work sufficiently well for him to proceed. The question was settled for him with a suddenness that nearly unnerved him. An appalling clang of the bell, a startling sound that seemed loud enough to wake the dead, made him spring nearly to the ceiling. He dropped his rope and clung to the door in a panic of dread, his palpitating heart nearly suffocating him with its wild beating, staring with affrighted eyes at the machine which had given such an unexpected alarm. Slowly recovering command over himself, he turned his gaze on the sleepers: neither had moved; both were breathing as heavily as ever.

Pulling himself together, he turned his attention first to Picard, as the more dangerous man of the two, should an awakening come before he was ready for it. He bound Picard's wrists tightly together; then his ankles, his knees, and his elbows. He next did the same for Lamoine. With great effort he got Picard in a seated position on his chair, tying him there with coil after coil of the cord. So anxious was he to make everything secure, that he somewhat overdid the business, making the two seem like seated mummies swathed in cord. The chairs he fastened immovably to the floor, then he stood back and gazed with a sigh at the two grim seated figures, with their heads drooping helplessly forward on their corded breasts, looking like silent effigies of the dead.

Mopping his perspiring brow, Adolph now turned his attention to the machine that had startled him so when he first came in. He examined minutely its mechanism to see that everything was right. Going to the cupboard, he took up a

false bottom and lifted carefully out a number of dynamite cartridges that the two sleepers had stolen from a French mine. These he arranged in a battery, tying them together. He raised the hammer of the machine, and set the hand so that the blow would fall in sixty minutes after the machinery was set in motion. The whole deadly combination he placed on a small table, which he shoved close in front of the two sleeping men. This done, he sat down on a chair patiently to await the awakening. The room was situated at the back of the house, and was almost painfully still, not a sound from the street penetrating to it. The candle burnt low, guttered and went out, but Adolph sat there and did not light another. The room was still only half in darkness, for the moon shone brightly in at the window, reminding Adolph that it was just a month since he had looked out on a moonlit street in Paris, while his brother lay murdered in the room below. The hours dragged along, and Adolph sat as immovable as the two figures before him. The square of moonlight, slowly moving, at last illuminated the seated form of Picard, imperceptibly climbing up, as the moon sank, until it touched his face. He threw his head first to one side, then back, yawned, drew a deep breath, and tried to struggle.

"Lamoine," he cried "Adolph. What the devil is this? I say, here. Help! I am betrayed."

"Hush," said Adolph, quietly. "Do not cry so loud. You will wake Lamoine, who is beside you. I am here; wait till I light a candle, the moonlight is waning."

"Adolph, you fiend, you are in league with the police."

"No, I am not. I will explain everything in a moment. Have patience." Adolph lit a candle, and Picard, rolling his eyes, saw that the slowly awakening Lamoine was bound like himself.

Lamoine, glaring at his partner and not understanding what had happened, hissed —

"You have turned traitor, Picard; you have informed, curse you!"

"Keep quiet, you fool. Don't you see I am bound as tightly as you?"

"There has been no traitor and no informing, nor need of any. A month ago tonight, Picard, there was blown into eternity a good and honest man, who never harmed you or any one. I am his brother. I am Adolph Delore, who refused to

make your infernal machine for you. I am much changed since then; but perhaps now you recognise me?"

"I swear to God," cried Picard, "that I did not do it. I was in London at the time. I can prove it. There is no use in handing me over to the police, even though, perhaps, you think you can terrorise this poor wretch into lying against me."

"Pray to the God, whose name you so lightly use, that the police you fear may get you before I have done with you. In the police, strange as it may sound to you, is your only hope; but they will have to come quickly if they are to save you. Picard, you have lived, perhaps, thirty-five years on this earth. The next hour of your life will be longer to you than all these years."

Adolph put the percussion cap in its place and started the mechanism. For a few moments its quiet tick-tick was the only sound heard in the room, the two bound men staring with wide-open eyes at the dial of the clock, while the whole horror of their position slowly broke upon them.

Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick. Each man's face paled, and rivulets of sweat ran down from their brows. Suddenly Picard raised his voice in an unearthly shriek.

"I expected that," said Adolph, quietly. "I don't think anyone can hear, but I will gag you both, so that no risks may be run." When this was done, he said: "I have set the clockwork at sixty minutes; seven of those are already spent. There is still time enough left for meditation and repentance. I place the candle here so that its rays will shine upon the dial. When you have made your own peace, pray for the souls of any you have sent into eternity without time for preparation."

Delore left the room as softly as he had entered it, and the doomed men tried ineffectually to cry out as they heard the key turning in the door.

The authorities knew that someone had perished in that explosion, but whether it was one man or two they could not tell.

THE SHADOW OF THE GREENBACK.

Hickory Sam needed but one quality to be perfect. He should have been an arrant coward. He was a blustering braggart, always boasting of the men he had slain, and the odds he had contended against; filled with stories of his own valour, but alas! he shot straight, and rarely missed his mark, unless he was drunker than usual. It would have been delightful to tell how this unmitigated ruffian had been "held up" by some innocent tenderfoot from the East, and made to dance at the muzzle of a quite new and daintily ornamented revolver, for the loud-mouthed blowhard seemed just the man to flinch when real danger confronted him; but, sad to say, there was nothing of the white feather about Hickory Sam, for he feared neither man, nor gun, nor any combination of them. He was as ready to fight a dozen as one, and once had actually "held up" the United States army at Fort Concho, beating a masterly retreat backwards with his face to the foe, holding a troop in check with his two seven-shooters that seemed to point in every direction at once, making every man in the company feel, with a shiver up his back, that he individually was "covered," and would be the first to drop if firing actually began.

Hickory Sam appeared suddenly in Salt Lick, and speedily made good his claim to be the bad man of the district. Some old-timers disputed Sam's arrogant contention, but they did not live long enough to maintain their own well-earned reputations as objectionable citizens. Thus Hickory Sam reigned supreme in Salt Lick, and every one in the place was willing and eager to stand treat to Sam, or to drink with him when invited.

Sam's chief place of resort in Salt Lick was the Hades Saloon, kept by Mike Davlin. Mike had not originally intended this to be the title of his bar, having at first named it after a little liquor cellar he kept in his early days in Philadelphia, called "The Shades," but some cowboy humourist, particular about the external fitness of things, had scraped out the letter "S," and so the sign over the door had been allowed to remain. Mike did not grumble. He had taken a keen interest in

politics in Philadelphia, but an unexpected spasm of civic virtue having overtaken the city some years before, Davlin had been made a victim, and he was forced to leave suddenly for the West, where there was no politics, and where a man handy at mixing drinks was looked upon as a boon by the rest of the community. Mike did not grumble when even the name "Hades" failed to satisfy the boys in their thirst for appropriate nomenclature, and when they took to calling the place by a shorter and terser synonym beginning with the same letter, he made no objections.

Mike was an adaptive man, who mixed drinks, but did not mix in rows. He protected himself by not keeping a revolver, and by admitting that he could not hit his own saloon at twenty yards distance. A residence in the quiet city of Philadelphia is not conducive to the nimbling of the trigger finger. When the boys in the exuberance of their spirits began to shoot, Mike promptly ducked under his counter and waited till the clouds of smoke rolled by. He sent in a bill for broken glass, bottles, and the damage generally, when his guests were sober again, and his accounts were always paid. Mike was a deservedly popular citizen in Salt Lick, and might easily have been elected to the United States Congress, if he had dared to go east again. But, as he himself said, he was out of politics.

It was the pleasant custom of the cowboys at Buller's ranch to come into Salt Lick on pay-days and close up the town. These periodical visits did little harm to any one, and seemed to be productive of much amusement for the boys. They rode at full gallop through the one street of the place like a troop of cavalry, yelling at the top of their voices and brandishing their weapons.

The first raid through Salt Lick was merely a warning, and all peaceably inclined inhabitants took it as such, retiring forthwith to the seclusion of their houses. On their return trip the boys winged or lamed, with unerring aim, any one found in the street. They seldom killed a wayfarer; if a fatality ensued it was usually the result of accident, and much to the regret of the boys, who always apologised handsomely to the surviving relatives, which expression of regret was generally received in the amicable spirit with which it was tendered. There was none of the rancour of the vendetta in these little encounters; if a man happened to be blotted out, it was his ill luck, that was all, and there was rarely any thought of reprisal.

This perhaps was largely due to the fact that the community was a shifting one, and few had any near relatives about them, for, although the victim might have friends, they seldom held him in such esteem as to be willing to take up his

quarrel when there was a bullet hole through him. Relatives, however, are often more difficult to deal with than are friends, in cases of sudden death, and this fact was recognised by Hickory Sam, who, when he was compelled to shoot the younger Holt brother in Mike's saloon, promptly went, at some personal inconvenience, and assassinated the elder, before John Holt heard the news. As Sam explained to Mike when he returned, he had no quarrel with John Holt, but merely killed him in the interests of peace, for he would have been certain to draw and probably shoot several citizens when he heard of his brother's death, because, for some unexplained reason, the brothers were fond of each other.

When Hickory Sam was comparatively new to Salt Lick he allowed the Buller's ranch gang to close up the town without opposition. It was their custom, when the capital of Coyote county had been closed up to their satisfaction, to adjourn to Hades and there "blow in" their hard- earned gains on the liquor Mike furnished. They also added to the decorations of the saloon ceiling. Several cowboys had a gift of twirling their Winchester repeating rifles around the fore finger and firing it as the flying muzzle momentarily pointed upwards. The man who could put the most bullets within the smallest space in the roof was the expert of the occasion, and didn't have to pay for his drinks.

This exhibition might have made many a man quail, but it had no effect on Hickory Sam, who leant against the bar and sneered at the show as child's play.

"Perhaps you think you can do it," cried the champion. "I bet you the drinks you can't."

"I don't have to," said Hickory Sam, with the calm dignity of a dead shot. "I don't have to, but I'll tell you what I can do. I can nip the heart of a man with this here gun" showing his seven-shooter, "me a- standing in Hades here and he a-coming out of the bank." For Salt Lick, being a progressive town, had the Coyote County Bank some distance down the street on the opposite side from the saloon.

"You're a liar," roared the champion, whereupon all the boys grasped their guns and were on the look out for trouble.

Hickory Sam merely laughed, strode to the door, threw it open, and walked out to the middle of the deserted thoroughfare.

"I'm a bad man from Way Back," he yelled at the top of his voice. "I'm the toughest cuss in Coyote county, and no darned greasers from

Buller's can close up this town when I'm in it. You hear me! Salt Lick's wide open, and I'm standing in the street to prove it."

It was bad enough to have the town declared open when fifteen of them in a body had proclaimed it closed, but in addition to this to be called "greasers" was an insult not to be borne. A cowboy despises a Mexican almost as much as he does an Indian. With a soul-terrifying yell the fifteen were out of the saloon and on their horses like a cyclone. They went down the street with tornado speed, wheeling about, some distance below the temporarily closed bank, and, charging up again at full gallop, fired repeatedly in the direction of Hickory Sam, who was crouching behind an empty whiskey barrel in front of the saloon with a "gun" in either hand.

Sam made good his contention by nipping the heart of the champion when opposite the bank, who plunged forward on his face and threw the cavalcade into confusion. Then Sam stood up, and regardless of the scattering shots, fired with both revolvers, killing the foremost man of the troop and slaughtering three horses, which instantly changed the charge into a rout. He then retired to Hades and barricaded the door. Mike was nowhere to be seen.

But the boys knew when they had enough. They made no attack on the saloon, but picked up their dead, and, thoroughly sobered, made their way, much more slowly than they came, back to Buller's ranch.

When it was evident that they had gone, Mike cautiously emerged from his place of retirement, as Sam was vigorously pounding on the bar, threatening that if a drink were not forthcoming he would go round behind the bar and help himself.

"I'm a law and order man," he explained to Davlin, "and I won't have no toughs from Buller's ranch close up this town and interfere with commerce. Every man has got to respect the Constitution of the United States as long as my gun can bark, you bet your life!"

Mike hurriedly admitted that he was perfectly right, and asked him what he would have, forgetting in his agitation that Sam took one thing only, and that one thing straight.

Next day old Buller himself came in from his ranch to see if anything could be done about this latest affray. It was bad enough to lose two of his best herdsmen in a foolish contest of this kind, but to have three trained horses killed as well,

was disgusting. Buller had been one of the boys himself in his young days, but now, having grown wealthy in the cattle business, he was anxious to see civilisation move westward with strides a little more rapid than it was taking. He made the mistake of appealing to the Sheriff, as if that worthy man could be expected, for the small salary he received, to attempt the arrest of so dead a shot as Hickory Sam.

Besides, as the Sheriff quite correctly pointed out, the boys themselves had been the aggressors in the first place, and if fifteen of them could not take care of one man behind an empty whiskey barrel, they had better remain peaceably at home in the future, and do their pistol practice in the quiet, innocuous retirement of a shooting gallery. They surely could not expect the strong arm of the law, in the person of a peaceably-minded Sheriff, to reach out and pull their chestnuts from the fire when several of them had already burned their fingers, and when the chestnuts shot and drank as straight as Hickory Sam.

Buller, finding the executive portion of the law slow and reluctant to move, sought advice from his own lawyer, the one disciple of Coke-upon- Littleton in the place. The lawyer doubted if there was any legal remedy in the then condition of society around Salt Lick. The safest plan perhaps would be—mind, he did not advise, but merely suggested— to surround Hickory Sam and wipe him off the face of the earth. This might not be strictly according to law, but it would be effective, if carried out without an error.

The particulars of Buller's interview with the Sheriff spread rapidly in Salt Lick, and caused great indignation among the residents thereof, especially those who frequented Hades. It was a reproach to the place that the law should be invoked, all on account of a trivial incident like that of the day before. Sam, who had been celebrating his victory at Mike's, heard the news with bitter, if somewhat silent resentment, for he had advanced so far in his cups that he was all but speechless. Being a magnanimous man, he would have been quite content to let bygones be bygones, but this unjustifiable action of Buller's required prompt and effectual chastisement. He would send the wealthy ranchman to keep company with his slaughtered herdsmen.

Thus it was that when Buller mounted his horse after his futile visit to the lawyer, he found Hickory Sam holding the street with his guns. The fusillade that followed was without result, which disappointing termination is accounted for by the fact that Sam was exceedingly drunk at the time, and the ranchman

was out of practice. Seldom had Salt Lick seen so much powder burnt with no damage except to the window-glass in the vicinity. Buller went back to the lawyer's office, and afterwards had an interview with the bank manager. Then he got quietly out of town unmolested, for Sam, weeping on Mike's shoulder over the inaccuracy of his aim, gradually sank to sleep in a corner of the saloon.

Next morning, when Sam woke to temporary sobriety, he sent word to the ranch that he would shoot old Buller on sight, and, at the same time, he apologised for the previous eccentricities of his fire, promising that such an annoying exhibition should not occur again. He signed himself "The Terror of Salt Lick, and the Champion of Law and Order."

It was rumoured that old Buller, when he returned to the lawyer's office, had made his will, and that the bank manager had witnessed it. This supposed action of Buller was taken as a most delicate compliment to Hickory Sam's determination and marksmanship, and he was justly proud of the work he had thrown into the lawyer's hands.

A week passed before old Buller came to Salt Lick, but when he came, Hickory Sam was waiting for him, and this time the desperado was not drunk, that is to say, he had not had more than half a dozen glasses of forty rod that morning.

When the rumour came to Hades that old Buller was approaching the town on horseback and alone, Sam at once bet the drinks that he would fire but one shot, and so, in a measure, atone for the ineffectual racket he had made on the occasion of the previous encounter. The crowd stood by, in safe places, to see the result of the duel.

Sam, a cocked revolver in his right hand, stood squarely in the centre of the street, with the sturdy bearing of one who has his quarrel just, and who besides can pierce the ace spot on a card ten yards further away than any other man in the county.

[Illustration: SAM LOOKED SAVAGELY AROUND HIM]

Old Buller came riding up the street as calmly as if he were on his own ranch. When almost within range of Sam's pistol, the old man raised both hands above his head, letting the reins fall on the horse's neck. In this extraordinary attitude he rode forward, to the amazement of the crowd and the evident embarrassment of Sam.

"I am not armed," the old man shouted. "I have come to talk this thing over and settle it."

"It's too late for talk," yelled Sam, infuriated at the prospect of missing his victim after all; "pull your gun, old man, and shoot."

"I haven't got a gun on me," said Buller, still advancing, and still holding up his hands.

"That trick's played out," shouted Sam, flinging up his right hand and firing.

The old man, with hands above his head, leant slowly forward like a falling tower, then pitched head foremost from his horse to the ground, where he lay without a struggle, face down and arms spread out.

Great as was the fear of the desperado, an involuntary cry of horror went up from the crowd. Killing is all right and proper in its way, but the shooting of an unarmed man who voluntarily held up his hands and kept them up, was murder, even on the plains.

Sam looked savagely round him, glaring at the crowd that shrank away from him, the smoking pistol hanging muzzle downward from his hand.

"It's all a trick. He had a shooting-iron in his boot. I see the butt of it sticking out. That's why I fired."

"I'm not saying nothing," said Mike, as the fierce glance of Hickory rested on him, "'tain't any affair of mine."

"Yes, it is," cried Hickory.

"Why, I didn't have nothin' to do with it," protested the saloon keeper.

"No. But you've got somethin' to do with it now. What did we elect you coroner fur, I'd like to know? You've got to hustle around and panel your jury an' bring in a verdict of accidental death or something of that sort. Bring any sort or kind of verdict that'll save trouble in future. I believe in law and order, I do, an' I like to see things done regular."

"But we didn't have no jury for them cowboys," said Mike.

"Well, cowboys is different. It didn't so much matter about them. Still, it oughter been done, even with cowboys, if we were more'n half civilised. Nothin' like havin' things down on the record straight and shipshape. Now some o' you fellows help me in with the body, and Mike'll panel his jury in three shakes."

There is nothing like an energetic public-spirited man for reducing chaos to order. Things began to assume their normal attitude, and the crowd began to look to Sam for instruction. He seemed to understand the etiquette of these occasions, and those present felt that they were ignorant and inexperienced compared with him.

The body was laid out on a bench in the room at the back of the saloon, while the jury and the spectators were accommodated with such seats as the place afforded, Hickory Sam himself taking an elevated position on the top of a barrel, where he could, as it were, preside over the arrangements. It was vaguely felt by those present that Sam bore no malice towards the deceased, and this was put down rather to his credit.

"I think," said the coroner, looking hesitatingly up at Sam, with an expression which showed he was quite prepared to withdraw his proposal if it should prove inappropriate, "I think we might have the lawyer over here. He knows how these things should be done, and he's the only man in Salt Lick that's got a Bible to swear the jury on. I think they ought to be sworn."

"That's a good idea," concurred Sam. "One of you run across for him, and tell him to bring the book. Nothing like havin' these things regular and proper and accordin' to law."

The lawyer had heard of the catastrophe, and he came promptly over to the saloon, bringing the book with him and some papers in his hand. There was now no doubt about Sam's knowledge of the proper thing to do, when it was found that the lawyer quite agreed with him that an inquest, under the circumstances, was justifiable and according to precedent. The jury found that the late Mr. Buller had "died through misadventure," which phrase, sarcastically suggested by the lawyer when he found that the verdict was going to be "accidental death," pleased the jury, who at once adopted it.

When the proceedings were so pleasantly terminated by a verdict acceptable to all parties, the lawyer cleared his throat and said that his late client, having

perhaps a premonition of his fate, had recently made his will, and he had desired the lawyer to make the will public as soon as possible after his death. As the occasion seemed in every way suitable, the lawyer proposed, with the permission of the coroner, to read that portion which Mr. Buller hoped would receive the widest possible publicity.

Mike glanced with indecision at the lawyer and at Sam sitting high above the crowd on the barrel.

"Certainly," said Hickory. "We'd all like to hear the will, although I suppose it's none of our business."

The lawyer made no comment on this remark, but bowing to the assemblage, unfolded a paper and read it.

Mr. Buller left all his property to his nephew in the East with the exception of fifty thousand dollars in greenbacks, then deposited in the Coyote County Bank at Salt Lick. The testator had reason to suspect that a desperado named Hickory Sam (real name or designation unknown) had designs on the testator's life. In case these designs were successful, the whole of this money was to go to the person or persons who succeeded in removing this scoundrel from the face of the earth. In case the Sheriff arrested the said Hickory Sam and he was tried and executed, the money was to be divided between the Sheriff and those who assisted in the capture. If any man on his own responsibility shot and killed the said Hickory Sam, the fifty thousand dollars became his sole property, and would be handed over to him by the bank manager, in whom Mr. Buller expressed every confidence, as soon as the slayer of Hickory Sam proved the deed to the satisfaction of the manager. In every case the bank manager had full control of the disposal of the fund, and could pay it in bulk, or divide it among those who had succeeded in eliminating from a contentious world one of its most contentious members.

The amazed silence which followed the reading of this document was broken by a loud jeering and defiant laugh from the man on the barrel. He laughed long, but no one joined him, and, as he noticed this, his hilarity died down, being in a measure forced and mechanical. The lawyer methodically folded up his papers. As some of the jury glanced down at the face of the dead man who had originated this financial scheme of *post mortem* vengeance, they almost fancied they saw a malicious leer about the half-open eyes and lips. An awed whisper

ran round the assemblage. Each man said to the other under his breath: "Fif—ty —thous—and—dollars," as if the dwelling on each syllable made the total seem larger. The same thought was in every man's mind; a clean, cool little fortune merely for the crooking of a forefinger and the correct levelling of a pistol barrel.

The lawyer had silently taken his departure. Sam, soberer than he had been for many days, slid down from the barrel, and, with his hand on the butt of his gun, sidled, his back against the wall, towards the door. No one raised a finger to stop him; all sat there watching him as if they were hypnotised. He was no longer a man in their eyes, but the embodiment of a sum to be earned in a moment, for which thousands worked hard all their lives, often in vain, to accumulate.

Sam's brain on a problem was not so quick as his finger on a trigger, but it began to filter slowly into his mind that he was now face to face with a danger against which his pistol was powerless. Heretofore, roughly speaking, nearly everybody had been his friend; now the hand of the world was against him, with a most powerful motive for being against him; a motive which he himself could understand. For a mere fraction of fifty thousand dollars he would kill anybody, so long as the deed could be done with reasonable safety to himself. Why then should any man stay his hand against him with such a reward hanging over his head? As Sam retreated backwards from among his former friends they saw in his eyes what they had never seen there before, something that was not exactly fear, but a look of furtive suspicion against the whole human race.

Out in the open air once again Sam breathed more freely. He must get away from Salt Lick, and that quickly. Once on the prairie he could make up his mind what the next move was to be. He kept his revolver in his hand, not daring to put it into its holster. Every sound made him jump, and he was afraid to stand in the open, yet he could not remain constantly with his back to the wall. Poor Buller's horse, fully accoutred, cropped the grass by the side of the road. To be a horse-thief was, of course, worse than to be a murderer, but there was no help for it; without the horse escape was impossible. He secured the animal with but little trouble and sprang upon its back.

As he mounted, a shot rang out from the saloon. Sam whirled around in the saddle, but no one was to be seen; nothing but a thin film of pistol smoke melting in the air above the open door. The rider fired twice into the empty doorway, then, with a threat, turned towards the open country and galloped

away, and Salt Lick was far behind him when night fell. He tethered his horse and threw himself down on the grass, but dared not sleep. For all he knew, his pursuers might be within a few rods of where he lay, for he was certain they would be on his trail as soon as they knew he had left Salt Lick. The prize was too great for no effort to be made to secure it.

There is an enemy before whom the strongest and bravest man must succumb; that enemy is sleeplessness. When daylight found the desperado, he had not closed an eye all night. His nerve was gone, and, perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt a thrill of fear. The emptiness of the prairie, which should have encouraged him, struck a chill of loneliness into him, and he longed for the sight of a man, even though he might have to fight him when he approached. He must have a comrade, he said to himself, if he could find any human being in straits as terrible as his own, some one who would keep watch and watch with him through the night; but the comrade must either be ignorant of the weight of money that hung over the desperado's head, or there must be a price on his own. An innocent man would not see the use of keeping such strict watch; a guilty man, on learning the circumstances of the case, would sell Sam's life to purchase his own freedom. Fifty thousand dollars, in the desperado's mind, would do anything, and yet he himself, of all the sixty million people in the land, was the only one who could not earn it! A comrade, then, innocent or guilty, was impossible, and yet was absolutely necessary if the wanderer was to have sleep.

The horse was in distress through lack of water, and Sam himself was both hungry and thirsty. His next halting-place must be near a stream, yet perhaps his safety during the first night was due to the fact that his pursuers would naturally have looked for him near some watercourse, and not on the open prairie.

Ten days later, Mike Davlin was awakened at three in the morning, to find standing by his bed a gaunt, haggard living skeleton, holding a candle in one hand, and pointing a cocked revolver at Mike's head with the other.

"Get up," said the apparition hoarsely, "and get me something to eat and drink. Drink first, and be quick about it. Make no noise. Is there anybody else in the house?"

"No," said Mike, shivering. "You wait here, Sam, and I'll bring you something. I thought you were among the Indians, or in Mexico, or in the Bad Lands long ago."

"I'm in bad lands enough here. I'll go with you. I'm not going to let you out of my sight, and no tricks, mind, or you know what will happen."

"Surely you trust me, Sam," whined Mike, getting up.

"I don't trust any living man. Who fired that shot at me when I was leaving?"

"So help me," protested Mike, "I dunno. I wasn't in the bar at the time. I can prove I wasn't. Yer not looking well, Sam."

"Blister you for a slow dawdler, you'd not look well either, if you had no sleep for a week and was starved into the bargain. Get a move on you."

Sam ate like a wild beast what was set before him, and although he took a stiff glass of whiskey and water at the beginning, he now drank sparingly. He laid the revolver on the table at his elbow, and made Mike sit opposite him. When the ravenous meal was finished, he pushed the plate from him and looked across at Davlin.

"When I said I didn't trust you, Mike, I was a liar. I do, an' I'll prove it. When it's your interest to befriend a man, you'll do it every time."

"I will that," said Mike, not quite comprehending what the other had said.

"Now listen to me, Mike, and be sure you do exactly as I tell you. Go to where the bank manager lives and rouse him up as I roused you. He'll not be afraid when he sees it's you. Tell him you've got me over in the saloon, and that I've come to rob the bank of that fifty thousand dollars. Say that I'm desperate and can't be taken short of a dozen lives, and there is no lie in that, as you know. Tell him you've fallen in with my plans, and that we'll go over there and hold him up. Tell him the only chance of catching me is by a trick. He's to open the door of the place where the money is, and you're to shove me in and lock me up. But when he opens the door I'll send a bullet through him, and you and me will divide the money. Nobody will suspect you, for nobody'll know you were there but the bank man, and he'll be dead. But if you make one move except as I tell you the first bullet goes through you. See?"

Mike's eyes opened wider and wider as the scheme was disclosed. "Lord, what a head you have, Sam!" he said. "Why didn't you think of that before? The bank manager is in Austin."

"What the blazes is he doing there?"

"He took the money with him to put it in the Austin Bank. He left the day after you did, for he said the only chance you had, was to get that money. You might have done this the night you left, but not since."

"That's straight, is it?" said Sam suspiciously.

"It's God's truth I'm speaking," asserted Mike earnestly. "You can find that out for yourself in the morning. Nobody'll molest ye. Yer jus' dead beat for want o' sleep, I can see that. Go upstairs and go to bed. I'll keep watch, and not a soul'll know you're here."

Hickory Sam's shoulders sank when he heard the money was gone, and a look of despair came into his half closed eyes. He sat thus for a few moments unheeding the other's advice, then with an effort shook off his lethargy.

"No," he said at last, "I won't go to bed. I'd like to enrich you, Mike, but that would be too easy. Cut me off some slices of this cold meat and put them between chunks of bread. I want a three days' supply, and a bottle of whiskey."

Mike did as requested, and at Sam's orders attended to his horse. It was still dark, but there was a suggestion of the coming day in the eastern sky. Buller's horse was as jaded and as fagged out as its rider. As Sam, stooping like an old man, rode away, Mike hurried to his bedroom, noiselessly opened the window, and pointed at the back of the dim retreating man a shot-gun, loaded with slugs. He could hardly have missed killing both horse and man if he had had the courage to fire, but his hand trembled, and the drops of perspiration stood on his brow. He knew that if he missed this time, there would be no question in Sam's mind about who fired the shot. Resting the gun on the ledge and keeping his eye along the barrel, he had not the nerve to pull the trigger. At last the retreating figure disappeared, and with it Mike's chance of a fortune. He drew in the gun, and softly closed the window, with a long quivering sigh of regret.

Sidney Buller went west from Detroit when he received the telegram that announced his uncle's death and told him he was heir to the ranch. He was thirty years younger than his uncle had been at the time of his tragic death, and he bore a remarkable likeness to the old man; that is, a likeness more than striking, when it was remembered that one had lived all his life in a city, while the other had spent most of his days on the plains. The young man had seen the Sheriff on his

arrival, expecting to find that active steps had been taken towards the arrest of the murderer. The Sheriff assured him that nothing more effective could be done than what had been done by the dead man himself in leaving fifty thousand dollars to the killer of Hickory Sam. The Sheriff had made no move himself, for he had been confidently expecting every day to hear that Sam was shot.

Meanwhile, nothing had been heard or seen of the desperado since he left Salt Lick on the back of the murdered man's horse. Sidney thought this was rather a slipshod way of administering justice, but he said nothing, and went back to his ranch. But if the Sheriff had been indifferent, his own cowboys had been embarrassingly active. They had deserted the ranch in a body, and were scouring the plains searching for the murderer, making the mistake of going too far afield. They, like Mike, had expected Sam would strike for the Bad Lands, and they rode far and fast to intercept him. Whether they were actuated by a desire to share the money, a liking for their old "boss," or hatred of Hickory Sam himself, they themselves would have found it difficult to tell. Anyhow, it was a man-chase, and their hunting instincts were keen.

In the early morning Sidney Buller walked forth from the buildings of the ranch and struck for the open prairie. The sun was up, but the morning was still cool. Before he had gone far he saw, approaching the ranch, a single riderless horse. As the animal came nearer and nearer it whinnied on seeing him, and finally changed its course and came directly toward him. Then he saw that there was a man on its back; a man either dead or asleep. His hand hung down nerveless by the horse's shoulder, and swung helplessly to and fro as the animal walked on; the man's head rested on the horse's mane. The horse came up to Sidney, thrusting its nose out to him, whinnying gently, as if it knew him.

"Hello?" cried Sidney, shaking the man by the shoulder, "what's the matter? Are you hurt?"

Instantly the desperado was wide awake, sitting bolt upright, and staring at Sidney with terrified recognition in his eyes. He raised his right hand, but the pistol had evidently dropped from it when he, overcome by fatigue, and drowsy after his enormous meal, had fallen asleep. He flung himself off, keeping the animal between himself and his supposed enemy, pulled the other revolver and fired at Sidney across the plunging horse. Before he could fire again, Sidney, who was an athlete, brought down the loaded head of his cane on the pistol wrist of the ruffian, crying—

"Don't fire, you fool, I'm not going to hurt you!"

As the revolver fell to the ground Sam sprang savagely at the throat of the young man, who, stepping back, struck his assailant a much heavier blow than he intended. The leaden knob of the stick fell on Sam's temple, and he dropped as if shot. Alarmed at the effect of his blow, Sidney tore open the unconscious man's shirt, and tried to get him to swallow some whiskey from the bottle he found in his pocket. Appalled to find all his efforts unavailing, he sprang on the horse and rode to the stables for help.

The foreman coming out, cried: "Good heavens, Mr. Buller, that's the old man's horse. Where did you get him? Well, Jerry, old fellow," he continued, patting the horse, who whinnied affectionately, "they've been using you badly, and you've come home to be taken care of. Where did you find him, Mr. Buller?"

"Out on the prairie, and I'm afraid I've killed the man who was riding him. God knows, I didn't intend to, but he fired at me, and I hit harder than I thought."

Sidney and the foreman ran out together to where Jerry's late rider lay on the grass.

"He's done for," said the foreman, bending over the prostrate figure, but taking the precaution to have a revolver in his hand. "He's got his dose, thank God. This is the man who murdered your uncle. Think of him being knocked over with a city cane, and think of the old man's revenge money coming back to the family again!"

THE UNDERSTUDY.

The Monarch in the Arabian story had an ointment which, put upon the right eye, enabled him to see through the walls of houses. If the Arabian despot had passed along a narrow street leading into a main thoroughfare of London, one night just before the clock struck twelve, he would have beheld, in a dingy back room of a large building, a very strange sight. He would have seen King Charles the First seated in friendly converse with none other than Oliver Cromwell.

The room in which these two noted people sat had no carpet and but few chairs. A shelf extended along one side of the apartment, and it was covered with mugs containing paint and grease. Brushes were littered about, and a wig lay in a corner. A mirror stood at either end of the shelf, and beside these, flared two gas-jets protected by wire baskets. Hanging from nails driven in the walls were coats, waist-coats, and trousers of more modern cut than the costumes worn by the two men.

King Charles, with his pointed beard and his ruffles of lace, leaned picturesquely back in his chair, which rested against the wall. He was smoking a very black brier-root pipe, and perhaps his Majesty enjoyed the weed all the more that there was just above his head, tacked to the wall, a large placard, containing the words, "No smoking allowed in this room, or in any other part of the theatre."

Cromwell, in more sober garments, had an even jauntier attitude than the King, for he sat astride the chair, with his chin resting on the back of it, smoking a cigarette in a meerschaum holder.

"I'm too old, my boy," said the King, "and too fond of my comfort; besides, I have no longer any ambition. When an actor once realises that he will never be a Charles Kean or a Macready, then come peace and the enjoyment of life. Now, with you it is different: you are, if I may say so in deep affection, young and foolish. Your project is a most hare-brained scheme. You are throwing away all

you have already won."

"Good gracious!" cried Cromwell, impatiently, "what have I won?"

"You have certainly won something," resumed the elder calmly, "when a person of your excitable nature can play so well the sombre, taciturn character of Cromwell. You have mounted several rungs, and the whole ladder lifts itself up before you. You have mastered two or three languages, while I know but one, and that imperfectly. You have studied the foreign drama, while I have not even read all the plays of Shakespeare. I can do a hundred parts conventionally well. You will, some day, do a great part as no other man on earth can act it, and then fame will come to you. Now you propose recklessly to throw all this away and go into the wilds of Africa."

"The particular ladder you offer me," said Cromwell, "I have no desire to climb; I am sick of the smell of the footlights and the whole atmosphere of the theatre. I am tired of the unreality of the life we lead. Why not be a hero instead of mimicking one?"

"But, my dear boy," said the King, filling his pipe again, "look at the practical side of things. It costs a fortune to fit out an African expedition. Where are you to get the money?"

This question sounded more natural from the lips of the King than did the answer from the lips of Cromwell.

"There has been too much force and too much expenditure about African travel. I do not intend to cross the Continent with arms and the munitions of war. As you remarked a while ago, I know several European languages, and if you will forgive what sounds like boasting, I may say that I have a gift for picking up tongues. I have money enough to fit myself out with some necessary scientific instruments, and to pay my passage to the coast. Once there, I shall win my way across the Continent through love and not through fear."

"You will lose your head," said King Charles; "they don't understand that sort of thing out there, and, besides, the idea is not original. Didn't Livingstone try that tack?"

"Yes, but people have forgotten Livingstone and his methods. It is now the explosive bullet and the elephant gun. I intend to learn the language of the

different native tribes I meet, and if a chief opposes me and will not allow me to pass through his territory, and if I find I cannot win him over to my side by persuasive talk, then I shall go round."

"And what is to be the outcome of it all?" cried Charles. "What is your object?"

"Fame, my boy, fame," cried Cromwell, enthusiastically, flinging the chair from under him and pacing the narrow room. "If I can get from coast to coast without taking the life of a single native, won't that be something greater than all the play-acting from now till Doomsday?"

"I suppose it will," said the King, gloomily; "but you must remember you are the only friend I have, and I have reached an age when a man does not pick up friends readily."

Cromwell stopped in his walk and grasped the King by the hand. "Are you not the only friend I have," he said; "and why can you not abandon this ghastly sham and come with me, as I asked you to at first? How can you hesitate when you think of the glorious freedom of the African forest, and compare it with this cribbed and cabined and confined business we are now at?"

The King shook his head slowly, and knocked the ashes from his pipe. He seemed to have some trouble in keeping it alight, probably because of the prohibition on the wall.

"As I said before," replied the King, "I am too old. There are no pubs in the African forest where a man can get a glass of beer when he wants it. No, Ormond, African travel is not for me. If you are resolved to go, go and God bless you; I will stay at home and carefully nurse your fame. I shall from time to time drop appetising little paragraphs into the papers about your wanderings, and when you are ready to come back to England, all England will be ready to listen to you. You know how interest is worked up in the theatrical business by judicious puffing in the papers, and I imagine African exploration requires much the same treatment. If it were not for the Press, my boy, you could explore Africa till you were blind and nobody would hear a word about it, so I will be your advance agent and make ready for your home-coming."

At this point in the conversation between these two historic characters, the janitor of the theatre put his head into the room and reminded the celebrities that it was very late, whereupon both King and Commoner rose, with some

reluctance, and washed themselves; the King becoming, when he put on the ordinary dress of an Englishman, Mr. James Spence, while Cromwell, after a similar transformation, became Mr. Sidney Ormond; and thus, with nothing of Royalty or Dictatorship about them, the two strolled up the narrow street into the main thoroughfare and entered their favourite midnight restaurant, where, over a belated meal, they continued the discussion of the African project, which Spence persisted in looking upon as one of the maddest expeditions that had ever come to his knowledge; but the talk was futile, as most talk is, and within a month from that time Ormond was on the ocean, his face set towards Africa.

Another man took Ormond's place at the theatre, and Spence continued to play his part, as the papers said, in his usual acceptable manner. He heard from his friend, in due course, when he landed. Then at intervals came one or two letters showing how he had surmounted the numerous difficulties with which he had to contend. After a long interval came a letter from the interior of Africa, sent to the coast by messenger. Although at the beginning of this letter Ormond said he had but faint hope of reaching his destination, he, nevertheless, gave a very complete account of his wanderings and dealings with the natives, and up to that point his journey seemed to be most satisfactory. He inclosed several photographs, mostly very bad ones, which he had managed to develop and print in the wilderness. One, however, of himself was easily recognisable, and Spence had it copied and enlarged, hanging the framed enlargement in whatever dressing-room fate assigned to him; for Spence never had a long engagement at any one theatre. He was a useful man who could take any part, but had no specialty, and London was full of such.

For a long time he heard nothing from his friend, and the newspaper men to whom Spence indefatigably furnished interesting items about the lone explorer, began to look upon Ormond as an African Mrs. Harris, and the paragraphs, to Spence's deep regret, failed to appear. The journalists, who were a flippant lot, used to accost Spence with "Well, Jimmy, how's your African friend?" and the more he tried to convince them, the less they believed in the peace-loving traveller.

At last there came a final letter from Africa, a letter that filled the tender, middle-aged heart of Spence with the deepest grief he had ever known. It was written in a shaky hand, and the writer began by saying that he knew neither the date nor his locality. He had been ill and delirious with fever, and was now, at last, in his right mind, but felt the grip of death upon him. The natives had told him that no

one ever recovered from the malady he had caught in the swamp, and his own feelings led him to believe that his case was hopeless. The natives had been very kind to him throughout, and his followers had promised to bring his boxes to the coast. The boxes contained the collections he had made, and also his complete journal, which he had written up to the day he became ill.

Ormond begged his friend to hand over his belongings to the Geographical Society, and to arrange for the publication of his journal, if possible. It might secure for him the fame he had died to achieve, or it might not; but, he added, he left the whole conduct of the affair unreservedly to his friend, in whom he had that love and confidence which a man gives to another man but once in his life—when he is young. The tears were in Jimmy's eyes long before he had finished the letter.

He turned to another letter he had received by the same mail, and which also bore the South African stamp upon it. Hoping to find some news of his friend he broke the seal, but it was merely an intimation from the steamship company that half-a-dozen boxes remained at the southern terminus of the line addressed to him; but, they said, until they were assured the freight upon them to Southampton would be paid, they would not be forwarded.

A week later, the London papers announced in large type, "Mysterious disappearance of an actor." The well-known actor, Mr. James Spence, had left the theatre in which he had been playing the part of Joseph to a great actor's Richelieu, and had not been heard of since. The janitor remembered him leaving that night, for he had not returned his salutation, which was most unusual. His friends had noticed that for a few days previous to his disappearance he had been apparently in deep dejection, and fears were entertained. One journalist said jestingly that probably Jimmy had gone to see what had become of his African friend; but the joke, such as it was, was not favourably received, for when a man is called Jimmy until late in life, it shows that people have an affection for him, and every one who knew Spence was sorry he had disappeared, and hoped that no evil had overtaken him.

It was a year after the disappearance that a wan, living skeleton staggered out of the wilderness in Africa, and blindly groped his way to the coast as a man might who had lived long in darkness and found the light too strong for his eyes. He managed to reach a port, and there took steamer homeward bound for Southampton. The sea-breezes revived him somewhat, but it was evident to all

the passengers that he had passed through a desperate illness. It was just a toss-up whether he could live until he saw England again. It was impossible to guess at his age, so heavy a hand had disease laid upon him, and he did not seem to care to make acquaintances, but kept much to himself, sitting wrapped up in his chair, gazing with a tired-out look at the green ocean.

A young girl frequently sat in a chair near him, ostensibly reading, but more often glancing sympathetically at the wan figure beside her. Many times she seemed about to speak to him, but apparently hesitated to do so, for the man took no notice of his fellow-passengers. At length, however, she mustered up courage to address him, and said: "There is a good story in this magazine: perhaps you would like to read it?"

He turned his eyes from the sea and rested them vacantly upon her face for a moment. His dark moustache added to the pallor of his face, but did not conceal the faint smile that came to his lips; he had heard her, but had not understood.

"What did you say?" he asked, gently.

"I said there was a good story here, entitled 'Author! Author!' and I thought you might like to read it," and the girl blushed very prettily as she said this, for the man looked younger than he had done before he smiled.

"I am afraid," said the man, slowly, "that I have forgotten how to read. It is a long time since I have seen a book or a magazine. Won't you tell me the story? I would much rather hear it from you than make an attempt to read it myself in the magazine."

"Oh," she cried, breathlessly, "I'm not sure that I could tell it; at any rate, not as well as the author does; but I will read it to you if you like."

The story was about a man who had written a play, and who thought, as every playwright thinks, that it was a great addition to the drama, and would bring him fame and fortune. He took this play to a London manager, but heard nothing of it for a long time, and at last it was returned to him. Then, on going to a first night at the theatre to see a new tragedy, which this manager called his own, he was amazed to see his rejected play, with certain changes, produced upon the stage, and when the cry "Author! Author!" arose, he stood up in his place; but illness and privation had done their work, and he died proclaiming himself the author of the play.

"Ah," said the man, when the reading was finished, "I cannot tell you how much the story has interested me. I once was an actor myself, and anything pertaining to the stage appeals to me, although it is years since I saw a theatre. It must be hard luck to work for fame and then be cheated out of it, as was the man in the tale; but I suppose it sometimes happens, although, for the honesty of human nature, I hope not very often."

"Did you act under your own name, or did you follow the fashion so many of the profession adopt?" asked the girl, evidently interested when he spoke of the theatre.

The young man laughed for, perhaps, the first time on the voyage. "Oh," he answered, "I was not at all noted. I acted only in minor parts, and always under my own name, which, doubtless, you have never heard—it is Sidney Ormond."

"What!" cried the girl in amazement; "not Sidney Ormond the African traveller?"

The young man turned his wan face and large, melancholy eyes upon his questioner.

"I am certainly Sidney Ormond, an African traveller, but I don't think I deserve the 'the,' you know. I don't imagine anyone has heard of me through my travelling any more than through my acting."

"The Sidney Ormond I mean," she said, "went through Africa without firing a shot; whose book, *A Mission of Peace*, has been such a success, both in England and America. But, of course, you cannot be he; for I remember that Sidney Ormond is now lecturing in England to tremendous audiences all over the country. The Royal Geographical Society has given him medals or degrees, or something of that sort— perhaps it was Oxford that gave the degree. I am sorry I haven't his book with me, it would be sure to interest you; but some one on board is almost certain to have it, and I will try to get it for you. I gave mine to a friend in Cape Town. What a funny thing it is that the two names should be exactly the same."

"It is very strange," said Ormond gloomily, and his eyes again sought the horizon and he seemed to relapse into his usual melancholy.

The girl arose from her seat, saying she would try to find the book, and left him

there meditating. When she came back, after the lapse of half an hour or so, she found him sitting just as she had left him, with his sad eyes on the sad sea. The girl had a volume in her hand. "There," she said, "I knew there would be a copy on board, but I am more bewildered than ever; the frontispiece is an exact portrait of you, only you are dressed differently and do not look—" the girl hesitated, "so ill as when you came on board."

Ormond looked up at the girl with a smile, and said—

"You might say with truth, so ill as I look now."

"Oh, the voyage has done you good. You seem ever so much better than when you came on board."

"Yes, I think that is so," said Ormond, reaching for the volume she held in her hand. He opened it at the frontispiece and gazed long at the picture.

The girl sat down beside him and watched his face, glancing from it to the book.

"It seems to me," she said at last, "that the coincidence is becoming more and more striking. Have you ever seen that portrait before?"

"Yes," said Ormond slowly. "I recognise it as a portrait I took of myself in the interior of Africa which I sent to a dear friend of mine; in fact, the only friend I had in England. I think I wrote him about getting together a book out of the materials I sent him, but I am not sure. I was very ill at the time I wrote him my last letter. I thought I was going to die, and told him so. I feel somewhat bewildered, and don't quite understand it all."

"I understand it," cried the girl, her face blazing with indignation. "Your friend is a traitor. He is reaping the reward that should have been yours, and so poses as the African traveller, the real Ormond. You must put a stop to it when you reach England, and expose his treachery to the whole country."

Ormond shook his head slowly and said—

"I cannot imagine Jimmy Spence a traitor. If it were only the book, that could be, I think, easily explained, for I sent him all my notes of travel and materials; but I cannot understand him taking the medals or degrees."

The girl made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Such things," she said, "cannot be explained. You must confront him and expose him."

"No," said Ormond, "I shall not confront him. I must think over the matter for a time. I am not quick at thinking, at least just now, in the face of this difficulty. Everything seemed plain and simple before, but if Jimmy Spence has stepped into my shoes, he is welcome to them. Ever since I came out of Africa I seem to have lost all ambition. Nothing appears to be worth while now."

"Oh!" cried the girl, "that is because you are in ill-health. You will be yourself again when you reach England. Don't let this trouble you now—there is plenty of time to think it all out before we arrive. I am sorry I spoke about it; but, you see, I was taken by surprise when you mentioned your name."

"I am very glad you spoke to me," said Ormond, in a more cheerful voice. "The mere fact that you have talked with me has encouraged me wonderfully. I cannot tell how much this conversation has been to me. I am a lone man, with only one friend in the world—I am afraid I must add now, without even one friend in the world. I am grateful for your interest in me, even though it was only compassion for a wreck—for a derelict, floating about on the sea of life."

There were tears in the girl's eyes, and she did not speak for a moment, then she laid her hand softly on Ormond's arm, and said, "You are not a wreck, far from it. You sit alone too much, and I am afraid that what I have thoughtlessly said has added to your troubles." The girl paused in her talk, but after a moment added—

"Don't you think you could walk the deck for a little?"

"I don't know about walking," said Ormond, with a little laugh, "but I'll come with you if you don't mind an encumbrance."

He rose somewhat unsteadily, and she took his arm.

"You must look upon me as your physician," she said cheerfully, "and I shall insist that my orders are obeyed."

"I shall be delighted to be under your charge," said Ormond, "but may I not

know my physician's name?"

The girl blushed deeply when she realised that she had had such a long conversation with one to whom she had never been introduced. She had regarded him as an invalid, who needed a few words of cheerful encouragement, but as he stood up she saw that he was much younger than his face and appearance had led her to suppose.

"My name is Mary Radford," she said.

"*Miss* Mary Radford?" inquired Ormond.

"Miss Mary Radford."

That walk on the deck was the first of many, and it soon became evident to Ormond that he was rapidly becoming his old self again. If he had lost a friend in England, he had certainly found another on board ship to whom he was getting more and more attached as time went on. The only point of disagreement between them was in regard to the confronting of Jimmy Spence. Ormond was determined in his resolve not to interfere with Jimmy and his ill-gotten fame.

As the voyage was nearing its end, Ormond and Miss Radford stood together leaning over the rail conversing quietly. They had become very great friends indeed.

"But if you will not expose this man," said Miss Radford, "what then is your purpose when you land? Are you going back to the stage again?"

"I don't think so," replied Ormond. "I shall try to get something to do and live quietly for awhile."

"Oh!" cried the girl, "I have no patience with you."

"I am sorry for that, Mary," said Ormond, "for, if I can make a living, I intend asking you to be my wife."

"Oh!" cried the girl breathlessly, turning her head away.

"Do you think I would have any chance?" asked Ormond.

"Of making a living?" inquired the girl, after a moment's silence.

"No. I am sure of making a living, for I have always done so; therefore answer my question. Mary, do you think I would have any chance?" and he placed his hand softly over hers, which lay on the ship's rail. The girl did not answer, but she did not withdraw her hand; she gazed down at the bright green water with its tinge of foam.

"I suppose you know," she said at length, "that you have every chance, and you are merely pretending ignorance to make it easier for me, because I have simply flung myself at your head ever since we began the voyage."

"I am not pretending, Mary," he said. "What I feared was that your interest was only that of a nurse in a somewhat backward patient. I was afraid I had your sympathy, but not your love. Perhaps such was the case at first."

"Perhaps such was the case—at first, but it is far from being the truth now—Sidney."

The young man made a motion to approach nearer to her, but the girl drew away, whispering—

"There are other people besides ourselves on deck, remember."

"I don't believe it," said Ormond, gazing fondly at her. "I can see no one but you. I believe we are floating alone on the ocean together, and that there is no one else in the wide world but our two selves. I thought I went to Africa for fame, but I see I really went to find you. What I sought seems poor compared to what I have found."

"Perhaps," said the girl, looking shyly at him, "Fame is waiting as anxiously for you to woo her as—as another person waited. Fame is a shameless hussy, you know."

The young man shook his head.

"No. Fame has jilted me once. I won't give her another chance."

So those who were twain sailed gently into Southampton Docks, resolved to be one when the gods were willing.

Mary Radford's people were there to meet her, and Ormond went up to London alone, beginning his short railway journey with a return of the melancholy that had oppressed him during the first part of his long voyage. He felt once more alone in the world, now that the bright presence of his sweetheart was withdrawn, and he was saddened by the thought that the telegram he had hoped to send to Jimmy Spence, exultingly announcing his arrival, would never be sent. In a newspaper he bought at the station, he saw that the African traveller, Sidney Ormond, was to be received by the Mayor and Corporation of a Midland town, and presented with the freedom of the city. The traveller was to lecture on his exploits in the town so honouring him, that day week. Ormond put down the paper with a sigh, and turned his thoughts to the girl from whom he had so lately parted. A true sweetheart is a pleasanter subject for meditation than a false friend.

Mary also saw the announcement in the paper, and anger tightened her lips and brought additional colour to her cheeks. Seeing how averse her lover was to taking any action against his former friend, she had ceased to urge him, but she had quietly made up her own mind to be herself the goddess of the machine.

On the night the bogus African traveller was to lecture in the Midland town, Mary Radford was a unit in the very large audience that greeted him. When he came on the platform she was so amazed at his personal appearance that she cried out, but fortunately her exclamation was lost in the applause that greeted the lecturer. The man was the exact duplicate of her betrothed.

She listened to the lecture in a daze; it seemed to her that even the tones of the lecturer's voice were those of her lover. She paid little heed to the matter of his discourse, but allowed her mind to dwell more on the coming interview, wondering what excuses the fraudulent traveller would make for his perfidy.

When the lecture was over, and the usual vote of thanks had been tendered and accepted, Mary Radford still sat there while the rest of the audience slowly filtered out of the large hall. She rose at last, nerving herself for the coming meeting, and went to the side door, where she told the man on duty that she wished to see the lecturer. The man said that it was impossible for Mr. Ormond to see any one at that moment; there was to be a big supper; he was to meet the

Mayor and Corporation; and so the lecturer had said he could see no one.

"Will you take a note to him if I write it?" asked the girl.

"I will send it in to him; but it's no use, he won't see you. He refused to see even the reporters," said the door-keeper, as if that were final, and a man who would deny himself to the reporters would not admit Royalty itself.

Mary wrote on a slip of paper the words, "The affianced wife of the real Sidney Ormond would like to see you for a few moments," and this brief note was taken in to the lecturer.

The door-keeper's faith in the constancy of public men was rudely shaken a few minutes later, when the messenger returned with orders that the lady was to be admitted at once.

When Mary entered the green-room of the lecture hall she saw the double of her lover standing near the fire, her note in his hand and a look of incredulity on his face.

The girl barely entered the room, and, closing the door, stood with her back against it. He was the first to speak.

"I thought Sidney had told me everything; I never knew he was acquainted with a young lady, much less engaged to her."

"You admit, then, that you are not the true Sidney Ormond?"

"I admit it to you, of course, if you were to have been his wife."

"I am to be his wife, I hope."

"But Sidney, poor fellow, is dead; dead in the wilds of Africa."

"You will be shocked to learn that such is not the case, and that your imposture must come to an end. Perhaps you counted on his friendship for you, and thought that even if he did return he would not expose you. In that you were quite right, but you did not count on me. Sidney Ormond is at this moment in London, Mr. Spence."

Jimmy Spence, paying no attention to the accusations of the girl, gave a war-whoop which had formerly been so effective in the second act of "Pocahontas," in which Jimmy had enacted the noble savage, and then he danced a jig that had done service in *Colleen Bawn*. While the amazed girl watched these antics, Jimmy suddenly swooped down upon her, caught her around the waist, and whirled her wildly around the room. Setting her down in a corner, Jimmy became himself again, and dabbed his heated brow with his handkerchief carefully, so as not to disturb the makeup.

"Sidney in England again? That's too good news to be true. Say it again, my girl, I can hardly believe it. Why didn't he come with you? Is he ill?"

"He has been very ill."

"Ah, that's it, poor fellow. I knew nothing else would have kept him. And then when he telegraphed to me at the old address, on landing, of course, there was no reply, because, you see, I had disappeared. But Sid wouldn't know anything about that, and so he must be wondering what has become of me. I'll have a great story to tell him when we meet; almost as good as his own African experiences. We'll go right up to London to-night, as soon as this confounded supper is over. And what is your name, my girl?"

"Mary Radford."

"And you're engaged to old Sid, eh? Well! well! well! well! This is great news. You mustn't mind my capers, Mary, my dear; you see, I'm the only friend Sid has, and I'm old enough to be your father. I look young now, but you wait till the paint comes off. Have you any money? I mean, to live on when you're married; because I know Sidney never had much."

"I haven't very much either," said Mary, with a sigh.

Jimmy jumped up and paced the room in great glee, laughing and slapping his thigh.

"That's first rate," he cried. "Why, Mary, I've got over £20,000 in the bank saved up for you two. The book and lectures, you know. I don't believe Sid himself could have done as well, for he always was careless with money—he's often lent me the last penny he had, and never kept any account of it; and I never thought of paying it back, either, until he was gone, and then it worried me."

The messenger put his head into the room, and said the Mayor and the Corporation were waiting.

"Oh, hang the Mayor and the Corporation!" cried Jimmy; then, suddenly recollecting himself, he added, hastily, "No, don't do that. Just give them Jimmy —I mean Sidney—Ormond's compliments, and tell his Worship that I have just had some very important news from Africa, but will be with him directly."

When the messenger was gone Jimmy continued in high feather. "What a time we shall have in London. We'll all three go to the old familiar theatre, yes, and by Jove, we'll pay for our seats; *that* will be a novelty. Then we will have supper where Sid and I used to eat. Sidney shall talk, and you and I will listen; then I shall talk, and you and Sid will listen. You see, my dear, I've been to Africa too. When I got Sidney's letter saying he was dying I just moped about and was of no use to anybody. Then I made up my mind what to do. Sid had died for fame, and it wasn't just he shouldn't get what he paid so dearly for. I gathered together what money I could and went to Africa, steerage. I found I couldn't do anything there about searching for Sid, so I resolved to be his understudy and bring fame to him, if it were possible. I sank my own identity and made up as Sidney Ormond, took his boxes and sailed for Southampton. I have been his understudy ever since, for, after all, I always had a hope he would come back some day, and then everything would be ready for him to take the principal, and let the old understudy go back to the boards again and resume competing with the reputation of Macready. If Sid hadn't come back in another year, I was going to take a lecturing trip in America, and when that was done, I intended to set out in great state for Africa, disappear into the forest as Sidney Ormond, wash the paint off and come out as Jimmy Spence. Then Sidney Ormond's fame would have been secure, for they would be always sending out relief expeditions after him and not finding him, while I would be growing old on the boards and bragging what a great man my friend, Sidney Ormond, was."

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she rose and took Jimmy's hand.

"No man has ever been so true a friend to his friend as you have been," she said.

"Oh, bless you, yes," cried Jimmy, jauntily. "Sid would have done the same for me. But he is luckier in having you than in having his friend, although I don't deny I've been a good friend to him. Yes, my dear, he is lucky in having a plucky girl like you. I missed that somehow when I was young, having my head full of

Macready nonsense, and I missed being a Macready too. I've always been a sort of understudy, so you see the part comes easy to me. Now I must be off to that confounded Mayor and Corporation, I had almost forgotten them, but I must keep up the character for Sidney's sake. But this is the last act, my dear. To-morrow I'll turn over the part of explorer to the real actor … to the star."

"OUT OF THUN."

1.—BESSIE'S BEHAVIOUR.

On one point Miss Bessie Durand agreed with Alexander von Humboldt—in fact, she even went further than that celebrated man, for while he asserted that Thun was one of the three most beautiful spots on earth, Bessie held that this Swiss town was absolutely the most perfectly lovely place she had ever visited. Her reason for this conclusion differed from that of Humboldt. The latter, being a mere man, had been influenced by the situation of the town, the rapid, foaming river, the placid green lake, the high mountains all around, the snow-peaks to the east, the ancient castle overlooking everything, and the quaint streets with the pavements up at the first floors.

Bessie had an eye for these things, of course, but while waterfalls and profound ravines were all very well in their way, her hotel had to be filled with the right sort of company before any spot on earth was entirely satisfactory to Bessie. She did not care to be out of humanity's reach, nor to take her small journeys alone; she liked to hear the sweet music of speech, and if she started at the sound of her own, Bessie would have been on the jump all day, for she was a brilliant and effusive talker.

So it happened that, in touring through Switzerland, Bessie and her mother (somehow people always placed Bessie's name before that of her mother, who was a quiet little unobtrusive woman) stopped at Thun, intending to stay for a day, as most people do, but when Bessie found the big hotel simply swarming with nice young men, she told her mother that the local guide-book asserted that Humboldt had once said Thun was one of the three most lovely places on earth, and, therefore, they ought to stay there and enjoy its beauties, which they at once proceeded to do. It must not be imagined from this that Bessie was particularly fond of young men. Such was far from being the case. She merely liked to have

them propose to her, which was certainly a laudable ambition, but she invariably refused them, which went to show that she was not, as her enemies stated, always in love with somebody. The fact was that Miss Bessie Durand's motives were entirely misunderstood by an unappreciative world. Was she to be blamed because young men wanted her to marry them? Certainly not. It was not her fault that she was pretty and sweet, and that young men, as a rule, liked to talk with her rather than with any one else in the neighbourhood. Many of her detractors would very likely have given much to have had Bessie's various charms of face, figure, and manner. This is a jealous world, and people delight in saying spiteful little things about those more favoured by Providence than themselves. It must, however, be admitted that Bessie had a certain cooing, confidential way with people that may have misled some of the young men who ultimately proposed to her into imagining that they were special favourites with the young lady. She took a kindly interest in their affairs, and very shortly after making her acquaintance, most young men found themselves pouring into her sympathetic ear all their hopes and aspirations. Bessie's ear was very shell-like and beautiful as well as sympathetic, so that one can hardly say the young men were to blame any more than Bessie was. Nearly everybody in this world wants to talk of himself or herself, as the case may be, and so it is no wonder that a person like Bessie, who is willing to listen while other people talk of themselves, is popular. Among the many billions who inhabit this planet, there are too many talkers and too few listeners; and although Bessie was undoubtedly a brilliant talker on occasion, there is no doubt that her many victories resulted more from her appreciative qualities as a talented listener than from the entertaining charms of her conversation. Those women who have had so much to say about Bessie's behaviour might well take a leaf from her book in this respect. They would find, if they had even passably good looks, that proposals would be more frequent. Of course there is no use in denying that Bessie's eyes had much to do with bringing young men to the point. Her eyes were large and dark, and they had an entrancing habit of softening just at the right moment, when there came into them a sweet, trustful, yearning look that was simply impossible to resist. They gazed thus at a young man when he was telling in low whispers how he hoped to make the world wiser and better by his presence in it, or when he narrated some incident of great danger in which he took part, where (unconsciously, perhaps, on the teller's part) his own heroism was shown forth to the best possible advantage. Then Bessie's eyes would grow large and humid and tender, and a subdued light would come into them as she hung breathlessly on his words. Did not Desdemona capture Othello merely by listening to a recital of his own daring deeds, which were, doubtless, very greatly exaggerated?

The young men at the big hotel in Thun were clad mostly in knickerbockers, and many of them had alpenstocks of their own. It soon became their delight to sit on the terrace in front of the hotel during the pleasant summer evenings and relate to Bessie their hairbreath escapes, the continuous murmur of the River Aare forming a soothing chorus to their dramatic narrations. At least a dozen young men hovered round the girl, willing and eager to confide in her; but while Bessie was smiling and kind to them all, it was soon evident that some special one was her favourite, and then the rest hung hopelessly back. Things would go wonderfully well for this lucky young fellow for a day or two, and he usually became so offensively conceited in his bearing towards the rest, that the wonder is he escaped without personal vengeance being wreaked upon him; then all at once he would pack up his belongings and gloomily depart for Berne or Interlaken, depending on whether his ultimate destination was west or east. The young men remaining invariably tried not to look jubilant at the sudden departure, while the ladies staying at the hotel began to say hard things of Bessie, going even so far as to assert that she was a heartless flirt. How little do we know the motives of our fellow- creatures! How prone we are to misjudge the actions of others! Bessie was no flirt, but a high-minded, conscientious girl, with an ambition— an ambition which she did not babble about to the world, and therefore the world failed to appreciate her, as it nearly always fails to appreciate those who do not take it into their confidence.

It came to be currently reported in the hotel that Bessie had refused no less than seven of the young men who had been staying there, and as these young men had, one after another, packed up and departed, either by the last train at night or the earliest in the morning, the proprietor began to wonder what the matter was, especially as each of the departing guests had but a short time before expressed renewed delight with the hotel and its surroundings. Several of them had stated to the proprietor that they had abandoned their intention of proceeding further with their Swiss tour, so satisfied were they with Thun and all its belongings. Thus did the flattering opinion of Alexander von Humboldt seem about to become general, to the great delight of the hotel proprietor, when, without warning, these young men had gloomily deserted Thun, while its beauty undoubtedly remained unchanged. Naturally the good man who owned the hotel was bewildered, and began to think that, after all, the English were an uncertain, mind-changing race.

Among the guests there was one young fellow who was quite as much perplexed as the proprietor. Archie Severance was one of the last to fall under the spell of

Bessie—if, indeed, it is correct to speak of Archie falling at all. He was a very deliberate young man, not given to doing anything precipitately, but there is no doubt that the charming personality of Bessie fascinated him, although he seemed to content himself with admiring her from a distance. Bessie somehow did not appear to care about being admired from a distance, and once, when Archie was promenading to and fro on the terrace above the river, she smiled sweetly at him from her book, and he sat down beside her. Jimmy Wellman had gone that morning, and the rest had not yet found it out. Jimmy had so completely monopolised Miss Durand for the last few days that no one else had had a chance, but now that he had departed, Bessie sat alone on the terrace, which was a most unusual state of things.

"They tell me," said Bessie, in her most flattering manner, "that you are a famous climber, and that you have been to the top of the Matterhorn."

"Oh, not famous; far from it," said Archie modestly. "I have been up the Matterhorn three or four times; but then women and children make the ascent nowadays, so that is nothing unusual."

"I am sure you must have had some thrilling escapes," continued Bessie, looking with admiration at Archie's stalwart frame. "Mr. Wellman had an awful experience——"

"Yesterday?" interrupted Archie. "I hear he left early this morning."

"No, not yesterday," said Miss Durand coldly, drawing herself up with some indignation; but as she glanced sideways at Mr. Severance, that young man seemed so innocent that she thought perhaps he meant nothing in particular by his remark. So, after a slight pause, Bessie went on again. "It was a week ago. He was climbing the Stockhorn and all at once the clouds surrounded him."

"And what did Jimmy do? Waited till the clouds rolled by, I suppose."

"Now, Mr. Severance, if you are going to laugh at me, I shall not talk to you any more."

"I assure you, Miss Durand, I was not laughing at you. I was laughing at Jimmy. I never regarded the Stockhorn as a formidable peak. It is something like 7,195 feet high, I believe, not to mention the inches."

"But surely, Mr. Severance, you know very well that the danger of a mountain does not necessarily bear any proportion to its altitude above the sea."

"That is very true. I am sure that Jimmy himself, with his head in the clouds, has braved greater dangers at much lower levels than the top of the Stockhorn."

Again Miss Durand looked searchingly at the young man beside her, but again Archie was gazing dreamily at the curious bell-shaped summit of the mountain under discussion. The Stockhorn stands out nobly, head and shoulders above its fellows, when viewed from the hotel terrace at Thun.

There was silence for a few moments between the two, and Bessie said to herself that she did not at all like this exceedingly self-possessed young man, who seemed to look at the mountains in preference to gazing at her—which was against the natural order of things. It was evident that Mr. Severance needed to be taught a lesson, and Bessie, who had a good deal of justifiable confidence in her own powers as a teacher, resolved to give him the necessary instruction. Perhaps, when he had acquired a little more experience, he would not speak so contemptuously of "Jimmy," or any of the rest. Besides, it is always a generous action towards the rest of humanity to reduce the inordinate self-esteem of any one young man to something like reasonable proportions. So Bessie, instead of showing that she was offended by his flippant conversation and his lack of devotion to her, put on her most bewitching manner, and smiled the smile that so many before her latest victim had found impossible to resist. She would make him talk of himself and his exploits. They all succumbed to this treatment.

"I do so love to hear of narrow escapes," said Bessie confidingly. "I think it is so inspiring to hear of human courage and endurance being pitted against the dangers of the Alps, and coming out victorious."

"Yes, they usually come out victorious, according to the accounts that reach us; but then, you know, we never get the mountain's side of the story."

"But surely, Mr. Severance," appealed Bessie, "you do not imagine that a real climber would exaggerate when telling of what he had done."

"No; oh no. I would not go so far as to say that he would exaggerate exactly, but I have known cases where—well—a sort of Alpine glow came over a story that, I must confess, improved it very much. Then, again, curious mental transformations take place which have the effect of making a man, what the

vulgar term, a liar. Some years ago a friend of mine came over here to do a few ascents, but he found sitting on the hotel piazza so much more to his taste that he sat there. I think myself the verandah climber is the most sensible man of the lot of us; and, if he has a good imagination, there is no reason why he should be distanced by those you call real climbers, when it comes to telling stories of adventures. Well, this man, who is a most truthful person, took one false step. You know, some amateurs have a vile habit of getting the names of various peaks branded on their alpenstocks—just as if any real climber ever used an alpenstock."

"Why, what do they use?" asked Bessie, much interested.

"Ice-axes, of course. Now, there is a useful individual in Interlaken, who is what you might call a wholesale brander. He has the names of all the peaks done in iron at his shop, and if you take your alpenstock to him, he will, for a few francs, brand on it all the names it will hold, from the Ortler to Mont Blanc. My friend was weak enough to have all the ascents he had intended to make, branded on the alpenstock he bought the moment he entered Switzerland. They always buy an alpenstock the first thing. He never had the time to return to the mountains, but gradually he came to believe that he had made all the ascents recorded by fire and iron on his pole. He is a truthful man on every other topic than Switzerland."

"But you must have had some very dangerous experiences among the Alps, Mr. Severance. Please tell me of the time you were in the greatest peril."

"I am sure it would not interest you."

"Oh, it would, it would. Please go on, and don't require so much persuasion. I am just longing to hear the story."

"It isn't much of a story, because, you see, there is no Alpine glow about it."

Archie glanced at the girl, and it flashed across his mind that he was probably then in the greatest danger he had ever been in, in his life. She bent forward toward him, her elbows on her knees, and her chin— such a pretty chin!—in her hands. Her eyes were full upon him, and Archie had sense enough to realise that there was danger in their clear pellucid depths, so he turned his own from them, and sought refuge in his old friend, the Stockhorn.

"I think the narrowest escape I ever had was about two weeks ago. I went up ____"

"With how many guides?" interrupted Bessie breathlessly.

"With none at all," answered Archie, with a laugh.

"Isn't that very unsafe? I thought one always should have a guide."

"Sometimes guides are unnecessary. I took none on this occasion, because I only ascended as far as the Château in Thun, some three hundred feet above where we are sitting, and as I went by the main street of the town, the climb was perfectly safe in all weathers. Besides, there is generally a policeman about."

"Oh!" said the girl, sitting up suddenly very straight.

Archie was looking at the mountains, and did not see the hot anger surge up into her face.

"You know the steps leading down from the castle. They are covered in, and are very dark when one comes out of the bright sunlight. Some fool had been eating an orange there, and had carelessly thrown the peel on the steps. I did not notice it, and so trod on a bit. The next thing I knew I was in a heap at the foot of that long stairway, thinking every bone in my body was broken. I had many bruises, but no hurt that was serious; nevertheless, I never had such a fright in my life, and I hope never to have such another."

Bessie rose up with much dignity. "I am obliged to you for your recital, Mr. Severance," she said freezingly. "If I do not seem to appreciate your story as much as I should, it is perhaps because I am not accustomed to being laughed at."

"I assure you, Miss Durand, that I am not laughing at you, and that this pathetic incident was anything but a laughing matter to me. The Stockhorn has no such danger lying in wait for a man as a bit of orange-peel on a dark and steep stairway. Please do not be offended with me. I told you my stories have no Alpine glow about them, but the danger was undoubtedly there."

Archie had risen to his feet, but there was no forgiveness in Miss Durand's eyes as she bade him "Good-morning," and went into the hotel, leaving him standing

there.

During the week that followed, Archie had little chance of making his peace with Miss Durand, for in that week the Sanderson episode had its beginning, its rise, and its culmination. Charley Sanderson, emboldened by the sudden departure of Wellman, became the constant attendant of Bessie, and everything appeared to be in his favour until the evening he left. That evening the two strolled along the walk that borders the north side of the river, leading to the lake. They said they were going to see the Alpine glow on the snow mountains, but nobody believed that, for the glow can be seen quite as well from the terrace in front of the hotel. Be that as it may, they came back together, shortly before eight o'clock, Bessie looking her prettiest, and Sanderson with a black frown on his face, evidently in the worst of tempers. He flung his belongings into a bag, and departed by the 8:40 train for Berne. As Archie met the pair, Bessie actually smiled very sweetly upon him, while Sanderson glared as if he had never met Severance before.

"*That* episode is evidently ended," said Archie to himself, as he continued his walk toward Lake Thun. "I wonder if it is pure devilment that induces her to lead people on to a proposal, and then drop them. I suppose Charley will leave now, and we'll have no more games of billiards together. I wonder why they all seem to think it the proper thing to go away. I wouldn't. A woman is like a difficult peak—if you don't succeed the first time, you should try again. I believe I shall try half a dozen proposals with Bessie myself. If I ever come to the point, she won't find it so easy to get rid of me as she does of all the rest."

Meditating thus, he sat down on a bench under the trees facing the lake. Archie wondered if the momentous question had been asked at this spot. It seemed just the place for it, and he noticed that the gravel on the path was much disturbed, as if by the iron-shod point of an agitated man's cane. Then he remembered that Sanderson was carrying an iron-pointed cane. As Archie smiled and looked about him, he saw on the seat beside him a neat little morocco-bound book with a silver clasp. It had evidently slipped from the insecure dress-pocket of a lady who had been sitting there. Archie picked it up and turned it over and over in his hands. It is a painful thing to be compelled to make excuse for one of whom we would fain speak well, but it must be admitted that at this point in his life Severance did what he should not have done—he actually read the contents of the book, although he must have been aware, before he turned the second leaf, that what was there set down was meant for no eye save the writer's own. Archie

excuses himself by maintaining that he had to read the book before he could be sure it belonged to anybody in particular, and that he opened it at first merely to see if there were a name or card inside; but there is little doubt that the young man knew from the very first whose book it was, and he might at least have asked Miss Durand if it were hers before he opened it. However, there is little purpose in speculating on what might have been, and as the reading of the note-book led directly to the utterly unjustifiable action of Severance afterwards, as one wrong step invariably leads to another, the contents of the little volume are here given, so that the reader of this tragedy may the more fully understand the situation.

II.—BESSIE'S CONFESSION.

"*Aug. 1st.*—The keeping of a diary is a silly fashion, and I am sure I would not bother with one, if my memory were good, and if I had not a great object in view. However, I do not intend this book to be more than a collection of notes that will be useful to me when I begin my novel. The novel is to be the work of my life, and I mean to use every talent I may have to make it unique and true to life. I think the New Woman novel is a thing of the past, and that the time has now come for a story of the old sort, yet written with a fidelity to life such as has never been attempted by the old novelists. A painter or a sculptor uses a model while producing a great picture or a statue. Why should not a writer use a model also? The motive of all great novels must be love, and the culminating point of a love-story is the proposal. In no novel that I have ever read is the proposal well done. Men evidently do not talk to each other about the proposals they make, therefore a man-writer has merely his own experience to go upon, so his proposals have a sameness—his hero proposes just as he himself has done or would do. Women-writers seem to have more imagination in this matter, but they describe a proposal as they would like it to be, and not as it actually is. I find that it is quite an easy thing to get a man to propose. I suppose I have a gift that way, and, besides, there is no denying the fact that I am handsome, and perhaps that is something of an aid. I therefore intend to write down in this book all my proposals, using the exact language the man employed, and thus I shall have the proposals in my novel precisely as they occurred. I shall also set down here any thoughts that may be of use to me when I write my book.

"*Aug. 2nd.*—I shall hereafter not date the notes in this book; that will make it look less like a diary, which I detest. We are in Thun, which is a lovely place. Humboldt, whoever he is or was, said it is one of the three prettiest spots on earth. I wonder what the names are of the other two. We intended to stay but one night at this hotel, but I see it is full of young men, and as all the women seem to be rather ugly and given to gossip, I think this is just the place for the carrying

out of my plans. The average young man is always ready to fall in love while on his vacation—it makes time pass so pleasantly; and as I read somewhere that man, as a general rule, proposes fourteen times during his life, I may as well, in the interests of literature, be the recipient of some of these offers. I have hit on what I think is a marvellous idea. I shall arrange the offers with some regard to the scenery, just as I suppose a stage-manager does. One shall propose by the river—there are lovely shady walks on both sides; another, up in the mountains; another, in the moonlight on the lake, in one of the pretty foreign-looking rowing boats they have here, with striped awnings. I don't believe any novelist has ever thought of such a thing. Then I can write down a vivid description of the scenery in conjunction with the language the young man uses. If my book is not a success, it will be because there are no discriminating critics in England.

"First proposal—This came on rather unexpectedly. His name is Samuel Caldwell, and he is a curate here for his health. He is not in the least in love with me, but he thinks he is, and so, I suppose, it comes to the same thing. He began by saying that I was the only one who ever understood his real aspirations, and that if I would join my lot with his he was sure we should not only bring happiness to ourselves, but to others as well. I told him gently that my own highest aspiration was to write a successful novel, and this horrified him, for he thinks novels are wicked. He has gone to Grindelwald, where he thinks the air is more suitable for his lungs. I hardly count this as a proposal, and it took me so much by surprise that it was half over before I realised it was actually an offer of his heart and hand. Besides, it took place in the hotel garden, of all unlikely spots, where we were in constant danger of interruption.

"Second proposal—Richard King is a very nice fellow, and was tremendously in earnest. He says his life is blighted, but he will soon come to a different opinion at Interlaken, where Margaret Dunn writes me it is very gay, and where Richard has gone. Last evening we strolled down by the lake, and he suggested that we should go out on the water. He engaged a boat with two women to row, one sitting at the stern, and the other standing at the prow, working great oars that looked like cricket-bats. The women did not understand English, and we floated on the lake until the moon came up over the snow mountains. Richard leaned over, and tried to take my hand, whispering, in a low voice, 'Bessie.' I confess I was rather in a flutter, and could think of nothing better to say than 'Sir!' in a tone of surprise and indignation. He went on hurriedly—

"'Bessie,' he said, 'we have known each other only a few days, but in those few days I have lived in Paradise.'

"'Yes,' I answered, gathering my wits about me; 'Humboldt says Thun is one of the three—'

"Richard interrupted me with something that sounded remarkably like 'Hang Thun!' Then he went on, and said that I was all the world to him; that he could not live without me. I shook my head slowly, and did not reply. He spoke with a fluency that seemed to suggest practice, but I told him it could never be. Then he folded his arms, sitting moodily back in the boat, saying I had blighted his life. He did look handsome as he sat there in the moonlight, with a deep frown on his brow; but I could not help thinking he sat back purposely, so that the moonlight might strike his face. I wish I could write down the exact language he used, for he was very eloquent; but somehow I cannot bring myself to do it, even in this book. I am sure, however, that when I come to write my novel, and turn up these notes, I shall recall the words. Still, I intended to put down the exact phrases. I wish I could take notes at the time, but when a man is proposing he seems to want all your attention.

"A fine, stalwart young man came to the hotel to-day, bronzed by mountain climbing. He looks as if he would propose in a manner not so much like all the rest. I have found that his name is Archibald Severance, and they say he is a great mountaineer. What a splendid thing a proposal on the high Alps would be from such a man, with the gleaming snow all around! I think I shall use that idea in the book.

"Third, fourth, fifth, and sixth proposals. I must confess that I am amazed and disappointed with the men. Is there no such thing as originality among mankind? You would think they had all taken lessons from some proposing master; they all have the same formula. The last four began by calling me 'Bessie,' with the air of taking a great and important step in life. Mr. Wellman varied it a little by asking me to call him Jimmy, but the principle is just the same. I suppose this sameness is the result of our modern system of education. I am sure Archie would act differently. I am not certain that I like him, but he interests me more than any of the others. I was very angry with him a week ago. He knows it, but he doesn't seem to care. As soon as Charley Sanderson proposes, I will see what can be done with Mr. Archie Severance.

"I like the name Archie. It seems to suit the young man exactly. I have been wondering what sort of scenery would accord best with Mr. Severance's proposal. I suppose a glacier would be about the correct thing, for I imagine Archie is rather cold and sneering when he is not in very good humour. The lake would be too placid for his proposal; and when one is near the rapids, one cannot hear what the man is saying. I think the Kohleren Gorge would be just the spot; it is so wild and romantic, with a hundred waterfalls dashing down the precipices. I must ask Archie if he has ever seen the Kohleren Falls. I suppose he will despise them because they are not up among the snow-peaks."

III.—BESSIE'S PROPOSAL.

After reading the book which he had no business to read, Archie closed the volume, fastened the clasp, and slipped it into his inside pocket. There was a meditative look in his eyes as he gazed over the blue lake.

"I can't return it to her—now," Archie said to himself. "Perhaps I should not have read it. So she is not a flirt, after all, but merely uses us poor mortals as models." Archie sighed. "I think that's better than being a flirt—but I'm not quite sure. I suppose an author is justified in going to great lengths to ensure the success of so important a thing as a book. It may be that I can assist her with this tremendous work of fiction. I shall think about it. But what am I to do about this little diary? I must think about that as well. I can't give it to her and say I did not read it, for I am such a poor hand at lying. Good heavens! I believe that is Bessie coming alone along the river-bank. I'll wager she has missed the book and knows pretty accurately where she lost it. I'll place it where I found it, and hide."

The line of trees along the path made it easy for Archie to carry out successfully his hastily formed resolution. He felt like a sneak, a feeling he thoroughly merited, as he dodged behind the trees and so worked his way to the main road. He saw Bessie march straight for the bench, pick up the book, and walk back towards the hotel, without ever glancing round, and her definite action convinced Archie that she had no suspicion any one had seen her book. This made the young man easier in his mind, and he swung along the Interlaken road towards Thun, flattering himself that no harm had been done. Nevertheless, he had resolved to revenge Miss Bessie's innocent victims, and as he walked, he turned plan after plan over in his mind. Vengeance would be all the more complete, as the girl had no idea that her literary methods were known to any one but herself.

For the next week Archie was very attentive to Bessie, and it must be recorded that the pretty young woman seemed to appreciate his devotion thoroughly and

to like it. One morning, beautifully arrayed in walking costume, Bessie stood on the terrace, apparently scanning the sky as if anxious about the weather, but in reality looking out for an escort, the gossips said to each other as they sat under the awnings busy at needlework and slander, for of course no such thought was in the young lady's mind. She smiled sweetly when Archie happened to come out of the billiard-room; but then she always greeted her friends in a kindly manner.

"Are you off for a walk this morning?" asked Archie, in the innocent tone of one who didn't know, and really desired the information.

He spoke for the benefit of the gossips; but they were not to be taken in by any such transparent device. They sniffed with contempt, and said it was brazen of the two to pretend that they were not meeting there by appointment.

"Yes," said Bessie, with a saucy air of defiance, as if she did not care who knew it; "I am going by the upper road to the Kohleren Falls. Have you ever seen them?"

"No. Are they pretty?"

"Pretty! They are grand—at least, the gorge is, although, perhaps, you would not think either the gorge or the falls worth visiting."

"How can I tell until I have visited them? Won't you be my guide there?"

"I shall be most happy to have you come, only you must promise to speak respectfully of both ravine and falls."

"I was not the man who spoke disrespectfully of the equator, you know," said Archie, as they walked off together, amidst the scorn of the gossips, who declared they had never seen such a bold-faced action in their lives. As their lives already had been somewhat lengthy, an idea may be formed of the heinousness of Bessie's conduct.

It took the pair rather more than an hour by the upper road, overlooking the town of Thun and the lake beyond, to reach the finger- board that pointed down into the Kohleren valley. They zigzagged along a rapidly falling path until they reached the first of a series of falls, roaring into a deep gorge surrounded by a dense forest. Bessie leaned against the frail handrail and gazed into the depths, Severance standing by her side.

The young man was the first to speak, and when he spoke it was not on the subject of the cataract.

"Miss Durand," he said, "I love you. I ask you to be my wife."

"Oh, Mr. Severance," replied Bessie, without lifting her eyes from the foaming chasm, "I hope that nothing in my actions has led you to——"

"Am I to understand that you are about to refuse me?" cried Archie, in a menacing voice that sounded above the roar of the falling waters.

Bessie looked quickly up at him, and, seeing a dark frown on his brow, drew slightly away from him.

"Certainly I am going to refuse you. I have known you scarcely more than a week!"

"That has nothing to do with it. I tell you, girl, that I love you.
Don't you understand what I say?"

"I understand what you say well enough; but I don't love you. Is not that answer sufficient?"

"It would be sufficient if it were true. It is not true. You *do* love me. I have seen that for days; although you may have striven to conceal your affection for me, it has been evident to every one, and more especially to the man who loves you. Why, then, deny what has been patent to all on-lookers? Have I not seen your face brighten when I approached you? Have I not seen a welcoming smile on your lips, that could have had but one meaning?"

"Mr. Severance," cried Bessie, in unfeigned alarm, "have you gone suddenly mad? How dare you speak to me in this fashion?"

"Girl," shouted Archie, grasping her by the wrist, "is it possible that I am wrong in supposing you care for me, and that the only other inference to be drawn from your actions is the true one?"

"What other inference?" asked Bessie, in a trembling voice, trying unsuccessfully to withdraw her wrist from his iron grasp.

"That you have been trifling with me," hissed Severance; "that you have led me on and on, meaning nothing; that you have been pretending to care for me when in reality you merely wanted to add one more to the many proposals you have received. That is the alternative. Now, which is the fact? Are you in love with me, or have you been fooling me?"

"I told you I was not in love with you; but I did think you were a gentleman. Now that I see you are a ruffian, I hate you. Let go my wrist; you are hurting me."

"Very good, very good. Now we have the truth at last, and I will teach you the danger of making a plaything of a human heart."

Severance released her wrist and seized her around the waist. Bessie screamed and called for help, while the man who held her a helpless prisoner laughed sardonically. With his free hand he thrust aside the frail pine pole that formed a hand-rail to guard the edge of the cliff. It fell into the torrent and disappeared down the cataract.

"What are you going to do?" cried the girl, her eyes wide with terror.

"I intend to leap with you into this abyss; then we shall be united for ever."

"Oh, Archie, Archie, I love you!" sobbed Bessie, throwing her arms around the neck of the astonished young man, who was so amazed at the sudden turn events had taken, that, in stepping back, he nearly accomplished the disaster he had a moment before threatened.

"Then why—why," he stammered, "did you—why did you deny it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose because I am contrary, or because, as you said, it was so self-evident. Still, I don't believe I would ever have accepted you if you hadn't forced me to. I have become so wearied with the conventional form of proposal."

"Yes, I suppose it does get rather tiresome," said Archie, mopping his brow. "I see a bench a little further down; suppose we sit there and talk the matter over."

He gave her his hand, and she tripped daintily down to the bench, where they sat down together.

"You don't really believe I was such a ruffian as I pretended to be?" said Archie at last.

"Why, yes; aren't you?" she asked simply, glancing sideways at him with her most winning smile.

"You surely didn't actually think I was going to throw you over the cliff?"

"Oh, I have often heard or read of it being done. Were you only pretending?"

"That's all. It was really a little matter of revenge. I thought you ought to be punished for the way you had used those other fellows. And Sanderson was such a good hand at billiards. I could just beat him."

"You—you said—you cared for me. Was that pretence too?" asked Bessie, with a catch in her voice.

"No. That was all true, Bessie, and there is where my scheme of vengeance goes lame. You see, my dear girl, I never thought you would look at me; some of the other fellows are ever so much better than I am, and of course I did not imagine I had any chance. I hope you will forgive me, and that you won't insist on having a real revenge by withdrawing what you have said."

"I shall have revenge enough on you, Archie, you poor, deluded young man, all your life. But never say anything about 'the other fellows,' as you call them. There never was any other fellow but you. Perhaps I will show you a little book some day that will explain everything, although I am afraid, if you saw it, you might think worse of me than ever. I think, perhaps, it is my duty to show it to you before it is too late to draw back. Shall I?"

"I absolutely refuse to look at it—now or any other time," said Archie magnanimously, drawing her towards him and kissing her.

And Bessie, with a sigh of relief, wondered why it was that men have so much less curiosity than women. She was sure that if he had hinted at any such secret she would never have rested until she knew what it was.

A DRAMATIC POINT.

In the bad days of Balmeceda, when Chili was rent in twain, and its capital was practically a besieged city, two actors walked together along the chief street of the place towards the one theatre that was then open. They belonged to a French dramatic company that would gladly have left Chili if it could, but, being compelled by stress of war to remain, the company did the next best thing, and gave performances at the principal theatre on such nights as a paying audience came.

A stranger would hardly have suspected, by the look of the streets, that a deadly war was going on, and that the rebels—so called—were almost at the city gates. Although business was ruined, credit dead, and no man's life or liberty safe, the streets were filled with a crowd that seemed bent on enjoyment and making the best of things.

As Jacques Dupré and Carlos Lemoine walked together they conversed earnestly, not of the real war so close to their doors, but of the mimic conflicts of the stage. M. Dupré was the leading man of the company, and he listened with the amused tolerance of an elder man to the energetic vehemence of the younger.

"You are all wrong, Dupré," cried Lemoine, "all wrong. I have studied the subject. Remember, I am saying nothing against your acting in general. You know you have no greater admirer than I am, and that is something to say when the members of a dramatic company are usually at loggerheads through jealousy."

"Speak for yourself, Lemoine. You know I am green with jealousy of you. You are the rising star and I am setting. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, Carl, my boy."

"That's nonsense, Dupré. I wish you would consider this seriously. It is because

you are so good on the stage that I can't bear to see you false to your art just to please the gallery. You should be above all that."

"How can a man be above his gallery—the highest spot in the house?
Talk sense, Carlos, and then I'll listen."

"Yes, you're flippant, simply because you know you're wrong, and dare not argue this matter soberly. Now she stabs you through the heart——"

"No. False premises entirely. She says something about my wicked heart, and evidently *intends* to pierce that depraved organ, but a woman never hits what she aims at, and I deny that I'm ever stabbed through the heart. Say in the region or the neighbourhood of the heart, and go on with your talk."

"Very well. She stabs you in a spot so vital that you die in a few minutes. You throw up your hands, you stagger against the mantel-shelf, you tear open your collar and then grope at nothing, you press your hands on your wound and take two reeling steps forward, you call feebly for help and stumble against the sofa, which you fall upon, and, finally, still groping wildly, you roll off on the floor, where you kick out once or twice, your clinched hand comes with a thud on the boards, and all is over."

"Admirably described, Carlos. Lord! I wish my audience paid such attention to my efforts as you do. Now you claim this is all wrong, do you?"

"All wrong."

"Suppose she stabbed you, what would *you* do?"

"I would plunge forward on my face—dead."

"Great heavens! What would become of your curtain?"

"Oh, hang the curtain!"

"It's all very well for you to maledict the curtain, Carl, but you must work up to it. Your curtain would come down, and your friends in the gallery wouldn't know what had happened. Now I go through the evolutions you so graphically describe, and the audience gets time to take in the situation. They say, chuckling to themselves, 'that villain's got his dose at last, and serve him right too.' They

want to enjoy his struggles, while the heroine stands grimly at the door taking care that he doesn't get away. Then when my fist comes down flop on the stage and they realise that I am indeed done for, the yell of triumph that goes up is something delicious to hear."

"That's just the point, Dupré. I claim the actor has no right to hear applause—that he should not know there is such a thing as an audience. His business is to portray life exactly as it is."

"You can't portray life in a death scene, Carl."

"Dupré, I lose all patience with you, or rather I would did I not know that you are much deeper than you would have us suppose. You apparently won't see that I am very much in earnest about this."

"Of course you are, my boy; and that is one reason why you will become a very great actor. I was ambitious myself once, but as we grow older" —Dupré shrugged his shoulders—"well, we begin to have an eye on box- office receipts. I think you sometimes forget that I am a good deal older than you are."

"You mean I am a fool, and that I may learn wisdom with age. I quite admit you are a better actor than I am; in fact I said so only a moment ago, but——"

"'You wrong me, Brutus; I said an elder soldier, not a better.' But I will take you on your own ground. Have you ever seen a man stabbed or shot through the heart?"

"I never have, but I know mighty well he wouldn't undo his necktie afterwards."

Dupré threw back his head and laughed.

"Who is flippant now?" he asked. "I don't undo my necktie, I merely tear off my collar, which a dying man may surely be permitted to do. But until you have seen a man die from such a stab as I receive every night, I don't understand how you can justly find fault with my rendition of the tragedy. I imagine, you know, that the truth lies between the two extremes. The man done to death would likely not make such a fuss as I make, nor would he depart so quickly as you say he would, without giving the gallery gods a show for their money. But here we are at the theatre, Carlos, and this acrimonious debate is closed— until we take our next walk together."

In front of the theatre, soldiers were on duty, marching up and down with muskets on their shoulders, to show that the state was mighty and could take charge of a theatre as well as conduct a war. There were many loungers about, which might have indicated to a person who did not know, that there would be a good house when the play began. The two actors met the manager in the throng near the door.

"How are prospects to-night?" asked Dupré.

"Very poor," replied the manager. "Not half a dozen seats have been sold."

"Then it isn't worth while beginning?"

"We must begin," said the manager, lowering his voice, "the President has ordered me not to close the theatre."

"Oh, hang the President!" cried Lemoine impatiently. "Why doesn't he put a stop to the war, and then the theatre would remain open of its own accord."

"He is doing his best to put a stop to the war, only his army does not carry out his orders as implicitly as our manager does," said Dupré, smiling at the other's vehemence.

"Balmeceda is a fool," retorted the younger actor. "If he were out of the way, the war would not last another day. I believe he is playing a losing game, anyhow. It's a pity he hasn't to go to the front himself, and then a stray bullet might find him and put an end to the war, which would save the lives of many better men."

"I say, Lemoine, I wish you wouldn't talk like that," expostulated the manager gently, "especially when there are so many listeners."

"Oh! the larger my audience, the better I like it," rejoined Lemoine.
"I have all an actor's vanity in that respect. I say what I think, and
I don't care who hears me."

"Yes, but you forget that we are, in a measure, guests of this country, and we should not abuse our hosts, or the man who represents them."

"Ah, does he represent them? It seems to me you beg the whole question; that's just what the war is about. The general opinion is that Balmeceda misrepresents

them, and that the country would be glad to be rid of him."

"That may all be," said the manager almost in a whisper, for he was a man evidently inclined towards peace; "but it does not rest with us to say so. We are French, and I think, therefore, it is better not to express an opinion."

"I'm not French," cried Lemoine. "I'm a native Chilian, and I have a right to abuse my own country if I choose to do so."

"All the more reason, then," said the manager, looking timorously over his shoulder—"all the more reason that you should be careful what you say."

"I suppose," said Dupré, by way of putting an end to the discussion, "it is time for us to get our war-paint on. Come along, Lemoine, and lecture me on our common art, and stop talking politics, if the nonsense you utter about Chili and its president is politics."

The two actors entered the theatre; they occupied the same dressing- room, and the volatile Lemoine talked incessantly.

Although there were but few people in the stalls the gallery was well filled, as was usually the case.

When going on for the last act in the final scene, Dupré whispered a word to the man who controlled the falling of the curtain, and when the actor, as the villain of the piece, received the fatal knife-thrust from the ill-used heroine, he plunged forward on his face and died without a struggle, to the amazement of the manager, who was watching the play from the front of the house, and to the evident bewilderment of the gallery, who had counted on an exciting struggle with death.

Much as they desired the cutting off of the villain, they were not pleased to see him so suddenly shift his worlds without an agonising realisation of the fact that he was quitting an existence in which he had done nothing but evil. The curtain came down upon the climax, but there was no applause, and the audience silently filtered out into the street.

"There," said Dupré, when he returned to his dressing-room; "I hope you are satisfied now, Lemoine, and if you are, you are the only satisfied person in the house. I fell perfectly flat, as you suggested, and you must have seen that the

climax of the play fell flat also."

"Nevertheless," persisted Lemoine, stoutly, "it was the true rendering of the part."

As they were talking the manager came into their dressing-room. "Good heavens, Dupré!" he said, "why did you end the piece in that idiotic way? What on earth got into you?"

"The knife," said Dupré, flippantly. "It went directly through the heart, and Lemoine here insists that when that happens a man should fall dead instantly. I did it to please Lemoine."

"But you spoiled your curtain," protested the manager.

"Yes, I knew that would happen, and I told Lemoine so; but he insists on art for art's sake. You must expostulate with Lemoine, although I don't mind telling you both frankly that I don't intend to die in that way again."

"Well, I hope not," replied the manager. "I don't want you to kill the play as well as yourself, you know, Dupré."

Lemoine, whose face had by this time become restored to its normal appearance, retorted hotly—

"It all goes to show how we are surrounded and hampered by the traditions of the stage. The gallery wants to see a man die all over the place, and so the victim has to scatter the furniture about and make a fool of himself generally, when he should quietly succumb to a well-deserved blow. You ask any physician and he will tell you that a man stabbed or shot through the heart collapses at once. There is no jumping-jack business in such a case. He doesn't play at leapfrog with the chairs and sofas, but sinks instantly to the floor and is done for."

"Come along, Lemoine," cried Dupré, putting on his coat, "and stop talking nonsense. True art consists in a judicious blending of the preconceived ideas of the gallery with the usual facts of the case. An instantaneous photograph of a trotting-horse is doubtless technically and absolutely correct, yet it is not a true picture of the animal in motion."

"Then you admit," said Lemoine, quickly, "that I am technically correct in what I

state about the result of such a wound."

"I admit nothing," said Dupré. "I don't believe you are correct in anything you say about the matter. I suppose the truth is that no two men die alike under the same circumstances."

"They do when the heart is touched."

"What absurd nonsense you talk! No two men act alike when the heart is touched in love, why then should they when it is touched in death? Come along to the hotel, and let us stop this idiotic discussion."

"Ah!" sighed Lemoine, "you will throw your chances away. You are too careless, Dupré; you do not study enough. This kind of thing is all very well in Chili, but it will wreck your chances when you go to Paris. If you studied more deeply, Dupré, you would take Paris by storm."

"Thanks," said Dupré, lightly; "but unless the rebels take this city by storm, and that shortly, we may never see Paris again. To tell the truth, I have no heart for anything but the heroine's knife. I am sick and tired of the situation here."

As Dupré spoke they met a small squad of soldiers coming briskly towards the theatre. The man in charge evidently recognised them, for, saying a word to his men, they instantly surrounded the two actors. The sergeant touched Lemoine on the shoulder, and said—

"It is my duty to arrest you, sir."

"In Heaven's name, why?" asked Lemoine.

The man did not answer, but a soldier stepped to either side of Lemoine.

"Am I under arrest also?" asked Dupré.

"No."

"By what authority do you arrest my friend?" inquired Dupré.

"By the President's order."

"But where is your authority? Where are your papers? Why is this arrest made?"

The sergeant shook his head and said—

"We have the orders of the President, and that is sufficient for us.
Stand back, please!"

The next instant Dupré found himself alone, with the squad and their prisoner disappearing down a back street. For a moment he stood there as if dazed, then he turned and ran as fast as he could, back to the theatre again, hoping to meet a carriage for hire on the way. Arriving at the theatre, he found the lights out, and the manager on the point of leaving.

"Lemoine has been arrested," he cried; "arrested by a squad of soldiers whom we met, and they said they acted by order of the President."

The manager seemed thunderstruck by the intelligence, and gazed helplessly at Dupré.

"What is the charge?" he said at last.

"That I do not know," answered the actor. "They simply said they were acting under the President's orders."

"This is bad; as bad as can be," said the manager, looking over his shoulder, and speaking as if in fear. "Lemoine has been talking recklessly. I never could get him to realise that he was in Chili, and that he must not be so free in his speech. He always insisted that this was the nineteenth century, and a man could say what he liked; as if the nineteenth century had anything to do with a South American Republic."

"You don't imagine," said Dupré, with a touch of pallor coming into his cheeks, "that this is anything serious. It will mean nothing more than a day or two in prison at the worst?"

The manager shook his head and said—

"We had better get a carriage and see the President as soon as possible. I'll undertake to send Lemoine back to Paris, or to put him on board one of the French ironclads. But there is no time to be lost. We can probably get a carriage

in the square."

They found a carriage and drove as quickly as they could to the residence of the President. At first they were refused admittance, but finally they were allowed to wait in a small room while their message was taken to Balmeceda. An hour passed, but still no invitation came to them from the President. The manager sat silent in a corner, while Dupré paced up and down the small room, torn with anxiety about his friend. At last an officer entered, and presented them with the compliments of the President, who regretted that it was impossible for him to see them that night. The officer added, for their information, by order of the President, that Lemoine was to be shot at daybreak. He had been tried by court-martial and condemned to death for sedition. The President regretted having kept them waiting so long, but the court-martial had been sitting when they arrived, and the President thought that perhaps they would be interested in knowing the verdict. With that the officer escorted the two dumb-founded men to the door, where they got into their carriage without a word. The moment they were out of earshot the manager said to the coachman—

"Drive as quickly as you can to the residence of the French Minister."

Every one at the French Legation had retired when these two panic- stricken men reached there, but after a time the secretary consented to see them, and, on learning the seriousness of the case, he undertook to arouse his Excellency, and learn if anything could be done.

The Minister entered the room shortly after, and listened with interest to what they had to say.

"You have your carriage at the door?" he asked, when they had finished their recital.

"Yes."

"Then I will take it and see the President at once. Perhaps you will wait here until I return."

Another hour dragged its slow length along, and they were well into the second hour before the rattle of wheels was heard in the silent street. The Minister came in, and the two anxious men saw by his face that he had failed in his mission.

"I am sorry to say," said his Excellency, "that I have been unable even to get the execution postponed. I did not understand, when I undertook the mission, that M. Lemoine was a citizen of Chili. You see that fact puts the matter entirely out of my hands. I am powerless. I could only advise the President not to carry out his intentions; but he is to- night in a most unreasonable and excited mood, and I fear nothing can be done to save your friend. If he had been a citizen of France, of course this execution would not have been permitted to take place; but, as it is, it is not our affair. M. Lemoine seems to have been talking with some indiscretion. He does not deny it himself, nor does he deny his citizenship. If he had taken a conciliatory attitude at the court- martial, the result might not have been so disastrous; but it seems that he insulted the President to his face, and predicted that he would, within two weeks, meet him in Hades. The utmost I could do, was to get the President to sign a permit for you to see your friend, if you present it at the prison before the execution takes place. I fear you have no time to lose. Here is the paper."

Dupré took the document, and thanked his Excellency for his exertions on their behalf. He realised that Lemoine had sealed his own fate by his independence and lack of tact.

The two dejected men drove from the Legation and through the deserted streets to the prison. They were shown through several stone-paved rooms to a stone-paved courtyard, and there they waited for some time until the prisoner was brought in between two soldiers. Lemoine had thrown off his coat, and appeared in his shirt sleeves. He was not manacled or bound in any way, there being too many prisoners for each one to be allowed the luxury of fetters.

"Ah," cried Lemoine when he saw them, "I knew you would come if that old scoundrel of a President would allow you in, of which I had my doubts. How did you manage it?"

"The French Minister got us a permit," said Dupré.

"Oh, you went to him, did you? Of course he could do nothing, for, as I told you, I have the misfortune to be a citizen of this country. How comically life is made up of trivialities. I remember once, in Paris, going with a friend to take the oath of allegiance to the French Republic."

"And did you take it?" cried Dupré eagerly.

"Alas, no! We met two other friends, and we all adjourned to a café and had something to drink. I little thought that bottle of champagne was going to cost me my life, for, of course, if I had taken the oath of allegiance, my friend, the French Minister, would have bombarded the city before he would have allowed the execution to go on."

"Then you know to what you are condemned," said the manager, with tears in his eyes.

"Oh, I know that Balmeceda thinks he is going to have me shot; but then he always was a fool, and never knew what he was talking about. I told him if he would allow you two in at the execution, and instead of having a whole squad to fire at me, order one expert marksman, if he had such a thing in his whole army, to shoot me through the heart, that I would show you, Dupré, how a man dies under such circumstances, but the villain refused. The usurper has no soul for

art, or anything else, for that matter. I hope you won't mind my death. I assure you I don't mind it myself. I would much rather be shot than live in this confounded country any longer. But I have made up my mind to cheat old Balmeceda if I can, and I want you, Dupré, to pay particular attention, and not to interfere."

As Lemoine said this he quickly snatched from the sheath at the soldier's side the bayonet which hung at his hip. The soldiers were standing one to the right, and one to the left of him, with their hands interlaced over the muzzles of their guns, whose butts rested on the stone floor. They apparently paid no attention to the conversation that was going on, if they understood it, which was unlikely. Lemoine had the bayonet in his hands before either of the four men present knew what he was doing.

Grasping both hands over the butt of the bayonet, with the point towards his breast, he thrust the blade with desperate energy nearly through his body. The whole action was done so quickly that no one realised what had happened until Lemoine threw his hands up and they saw the bayonet sticking in his breast. A look of agony came in the wounded man's eyes, and his lips whitened. He staggered against the soldier at his right, who gave way with the impact, and then he tottered against the whitewashed stone wall, his right arm sweeping automatically up and down the wall as if he were brushing something from the stones. A groan escaped him, and he dropped on one knee. His eyes turned helplessly towards Dupré, and he gasped out the words—

"My God! You were right—after all."

Then he fell forward on his face and the tragedy ended.

[Illustration: "MY GOD, YOU WERE RIGHT AFTER ALL!"]

TWO FLORENTINE BALCONIES.

Prince Padema sat desolately on his lofty balcony at Florence, and cursed things generally. Fate had indeed dealt hardly with the young man.

The Prince had been misled by the apparent reasonableness of the adage, that if you want a thing well done you should do it yourself. In committing a murder it is always advisable to have some one else to do it for you, but the Prince's plans had been several times interfered with by the cowardice or inefficiency of his emissaries, so on one unfortunate occasion he had determined to remove an objectionable man with his own hand, and realised then how easily mistakes may occur.

He had met the man face to face under a corner lamp in Venice. The recognition was mutual, and the man, fearing his noble enemy, had fled. The Prince pursued, and the man apparently tried to double upon him, and, with his cloak over his face, endeavoured to sneak past along the dark wall. When the Prince deftly ran the dagger into his vitals, he was surprised that the man made no resistance or outcry, made no effort to ward off the blow, but sunk lifeless at the Prince's feet with a groan.

Alarmed at this, the Prince bade his servant drag the body to a spot where a votive lamp set in the wall threw dim yellow rays to the pavement. Then his Highness was appalled to see that he had assassinated a scion of one of the noblest families of Venice, which was a very different thing from murdering a man of low degree whose life the law took little note of.

So the Prince had to flee from Venice, and he took up his residence in a narrow street in an obscure part of Florence.

Seldom had fate played a man so scurvy a trick, and the Prince was fully justified in his cursing, for the unfortunate episode had interrupted a most

absorbing amour which, at that moment, was rapidly approaching an interesting climax.

Prince Padema had been several weeks in Florence, and those weeks had been deadly dull. "The women of Florence," he said to himself bitterly, "are not to be compared with those of Venice." But even if they had been, the necessity of keeping quiet, for a time at least, would have prevented the Prince from taking advantage of his enforced sojourn in the fair city.

On this particular evening, the Prince's sombre meditations were interrupted by a song. The song apparently came from the same building in which his suite of rooms were situated, and from an open window some distance below him. What caught his attention was the fact that the song was Venetian, and the voice that sang it was the rich mellow voice of Venice.

There were other exiles, then, beside himself. He peered over the edge of the balcony perched like an eagle's nest high above the narrow stone street, and endeavoured to locate the open window from which the song came, or, better still, to catch a glimpse of the singer.

For a time he was unsuccessful, but at last his patience was rewarded. On a balcony to the right, and some distance below his own, there appeared the most beautiful girl even he had ever seen. The dark, oval face was so distinctly Venetian that he almost persuaded himself he had met her in his native town.

She stood with her hands on the top rail of the balcony, her dark hair tumbled in rich confusion over her shapely shoulders. The golden light in the evening sky touched her face with glory, as she looked towards it, of that part of it that could be seen at the end of the narrow street.

The Prince's heart beat high as he gazed upon the face that was unconscious of his scrutiny. Instantly the thought flashed over him that exile in Florence might, after all, have its compensations.

"Pietro," he whispered softly through his own open windows to the servant who was moving silently about the room, "come here for a moment, quietly."

The servant came stealthily to the edge of the window.

"You see that girl on the lower balcony," said the Prince in a whisper.

Pietro nodded.

"Find out for me who she is—why she is here—whether she has any friends. Do it silently, so as to arouse no suspicion."

Again his faithful servant nodded, and disappeared into the gloom of the room.

Next day Pietro brought to his eager master what information he had been able to glean. He had succeeded in forming the acquaintance of the Signorina's maid.

For some reason, which the maid either did not know or would not disclose, the Signorina was exiled for a time from Venice. She belonged to a good family there, but the name of the family the maid also refused to divulge. She dared not tell it, she said. They had been in Florence for several weeks, but had only taken the rooms below within the last two days. The Signorina received absolutely no one, and the maid had been cautioned to say nothing whatever about her to any person; but she had apparently succumbed in a measure to the blandishments of gallant Pietro.

The rooms had been taken because of their quiet and obscure position.

That evening the Prince was again upon his balcony, but his thoughts were not so bitter as they had been the day before. He had a bouquet of beautiful flowers beside him. He listened for the Venetian song, but was disappointed at not hearing it; and he hoped that Pietro had not been so injudicious as to arouse the suspicions of the maid, who might communicate them to her mistress. He held his breath eagerly as he heard the windows below open. The maid came out on the balcony and placed an easy-chair in the corner of it. She deftly arranged the cushions and the drapery of it, and presently the Signorina herself appeared, and with languid grace seated herself.

The Prince had now a full view of her lovely face, as the girl rested her elbow on the railing of the balcony, and her cheek upon her hand.

"You may go now, Pepita," said the girl.

The maid threw a lace shawl over the shoulders of her mistress, and departed.

The Prince leaned over the balcony and whispered, "Signorina."

The startled girl looked up and down the street, and then at the balcony which stood out against the opalescent sky, the tracery of ironwork showing like delicate etching on the luminous background.

She flushed and dropped her eyes, making no reply.

"Signorina," repeated the Prince, "I, too, am an exile. Pardon me. It is in remembrance of our lovely city;" and with that he lightly flung the bouquet, which fell at her feet on the floor of the balcony.

For a few moments the girl did not move nor raise her eyes; then she cast a quick glance through the open window into her room. After some slight hesitation she stooped gracefully and picked up the bouquet.

"Ah, beautiful Venice!" she murmured with a sigh, still not looking upwards.

The Prince was delighted with the success of his first advance, which is always the difficult step.

Evening after evening they sat there later and later. The acquaintance ripened to its inevitable conclusion—the conclusion the Prince had counted on from the first.

One evening she stood in the darkness with her cheek pressed against the wall at the corner of her balcony nearest to him; he looked over and downward at her.

"It cannot be. It cannot be," she said, with a frightened quaver in her voice, but a quaver which the Prince recognised, with his large experience, as the tone of yielding.

"It must be," he whispered down to her. "It was ordained from the first. It has to be."

The girl was weeping silently.

"It is impossible," she said at last. "My servant sleeps outside my door. Even if she did not know, your servant would, and there would be gossip—and scandal. It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," cried the Prince eagerly, "where true love exists. I shall

lock my door, and Pietro shall know nothing about it. He never comes unless I call him. I will get a rope and throw it to your balcony. Lock you your door as I do mine. In the darkness nothing is seen."

"No, no," she murmured. "That would not do. You could not climb back again, and all would be lost."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the young man eagerly. "It is nothing to climb back." He was about to add that he had done it frequently before, but he checked himself in time.

For a moment she was silent. Then she said: "I cannot risk your not getting back. It must be certain. If you get a rope—a strong rope—and put a loop in it for your foot, and pass the other end of the rope to me around the staunchest railing of your balcony, I will let you down to the level of my own. Then you can easily swing yourself within reach. If you find you cannot climb back, I can help you, by pulling on the rope and you will ascend as you came down."

The Prince laughed lightly.

"Do you think," he said, "that your frail hands are stronger than mine?"

"Four hands," she replied, "are stronger than two. Besides, I am not so weak as, perhaps, you think."

"Very well," he replied, not in a mood to cavil about trivialities.
"When shall it be—to-night?"

"No; to-morrow night. You must get your rope to-morrow."

Again the Prince laughed quietly.

"I have the rope in my room now," he answered.

"You were very sure," she said softly.

"No, not sure. I was strong in hope. Is your door locked?"

"Yes," she replied in an agitated whisper. "But it is still early. Wait an hour or two."

"Ah!" cried the Prince, "it will never be darker than at this moment, and think, my darling, how long I have waited!"

There was no reply.

"Stand inside the window," whispered the Prince. As she did so a coil of rope fell on the balcony.

"Have you got it?" he asked.

"Yes," was the scarcely audible reply.

"Then don't trust to your own strength. Give it a turn around the balcony rail."

"I have done so," she whispered.

Although he could not see her because of the darkness, she saw him silhouetted against the night sky.

He tested the loop, putting his foot in it and pulling at the rope with both hands. Then he put the rope round the corner support of the balcony.

"Are you sure the rope is strong enough?" she asked. "Who bought it?"

"Pietro got it for me. It is strong enough to hold ten men."

His foot was in the loop, and he slung himself from his balcony, holding the rope with both hands.

"Let it go very gently," he said. "I will tell you when you have lowered enough."

Holding the end of the rope firmly, the girl let it out inch by inch.

"That is enough," the Prince said at last; and she held him where he was, leaning over the balcony towards him.

"Prince Padema," she said to him.

"Ah!" cried the man with a start. "How did you learn my name?"

"I have long known it. It is a name of sorrow to our family.

"Prince," she continued, "have you never seen anything in my face that brought recollection to you? Or is your memory so short that the grief you bring to others leaves no trace on your own mind?"

"God!" cried the Prince in alarm, seizing the rope above him as if to climb back. "What do you mean?"

The girl loosened the rope for an inch or two, and the Prince was lowered with a sickening feeling in his heart as he realised his position a hundred feet above the stone street.

"I can see you plainly," said the girl in hard and husky tones. "If you make an attempt to climb to your balcony, I will at once loosen the rope. Is it possible you have not suspected who I am, and why I am here?"

The Prince was dizzy. He had whirled gently around in one direction for some time, but now the motion ceased, and he began to revolve with equal gentleness in the other direction, like the body of a man who is hanged.

A sharp memory pierced his brain.

"Meela is dead," he cried, with a gasp in his breath. "She was drowned. You are flesh and blood. Tell me you are not her spirit?"

"I cannot tell you that," answered the girl. "My own spirit seemed to leave me when the body of my sister was brought from the canal at the foot of our garden. You know the place well; you know the gate and the steps. I think her spirit then took the place of my own. Ever since that day I have lived only for revenge, and now, Prince Padema, the hour I have waited for is come."

An agonising cry for help rang through the silent street, but there was no answer to the call.

"It is useless," said the girl calmly. "It will be accounted an accident. Your servant bought the rope that will be found with you. Any one who knows you will have an explanation ready for what has happened. No one will suspect me, and I want you to know that your death will be unavenged, prince though you are."

"You are a demon," he cried.

She watched him silently as he stealthily climbed up the rope. He did not appear sufficiently to realise how visible his body was against the still luminous sky. When he was within a foot of his balcony she loosened the rope, and again he sunk to where he had been before, and hung there exhausted by his futile effort.

"I will marry you," he said, "if you will let me reach my balcony again. I will, upon my honour. You shall be a princess."

She laughed lightly.

"We Venetians never forget nor forgive. Prince Padema, good-bye!"

She sunk fainting in her chair as she let go the rope, and clapped her hands to her ears, so that no sound came up from the stone street below. When she staggered into her room, all was silence.

THE EXPOSURE OF LORD STANSFORD.

The large mansion of Louis Heckle, millionaire and dealer in gold mines, was illuminated from top to bottom. Carriages were arriving and departing, and guests were hurrying up the carpeted stair after passing under the canopy that stretched from the doorway to the edge of the street. A crowd of on-lookers stood on the pavement watching the arrival of ladies so charmingly attired. Lord Stansford came alone in a hansom, and he walked quickly across the bit of carpet stretched to the roadway, and then more leisurely up the broad stair. He was an athletic young fellow of twenty-six, or thereabout. The moment he entered the large reception-room his eyes wandered, searchingly, over the gallant company, apparently looking for some one whom he could not find. He passed into a further room, and through that into a third, and there, his searching gaze met the stare of Billy Heckle. Heckle was a young man of about the same age as Lord Stansford, and he also was seemingly on the look-out for some one among the arriving guests. The moment he saw Lord Stansford a slight frown gathered upon his brow, and he moved among the throng toward the spot where the other stood. Stansford saw him coming, and did not seem to be so pleased as might have been expected, but he made no motion to avoid the young man, who accosted him without salutation.

"Look here," said Heckle gruffly, "I want a word with you."

"Very well," answered Stansford, in a low voice; "so long as you speak in tones no one else can hear, I am willing to listen."

"You will listen, whether or no," replied the other, who, nevertheless, took the hint and subdued his voice. "I have met you on various occasions lately, and I want to give you a word of warning. You seem to be very devoted to Miss Linderham, so perhaps you do not know she is engaged to me."

"I have heard it so stated," said Lord Stansford, "but I have found some difficulty

in believing the statement."

"Now, see here," cried the horsey young man, "I want none of your cheek, and I give you fair warning that, if you pay any more attention to the young lady, I shall expose you in public. I mean what I say, and I am not going to stand any of your nonsense."

Lord Stansford's face grew pale, and he glanced about him to see if by chance any one had overheard the remark. He seemed about to resent it, but finally gained control over himself and said—

"We are in your father's house, Mr. Heckle, and I suppose it is quite safe to address a remark like that to me!"

"I know it's quite safe—anywhere," replied Heckle. "You've got the straight tip from me; now see you pay attention to it."

Heckle turned away, and Lord Stansford, after standing there for a moment, wandered back to the middle room. The conversation had taken place somewhat near a heavily-curtained window, and the two men stood slightly apart from the other guests. When they left the spot the curtains were drawn gently apart, and a tall, very handsome young lady stepped from between them. She watched Lord Stansford's retreat for a moment, and then made as though she would follow him, but one of her admirers came forward to claim her hand for the first dance. "Music has just begun in the ball-room," he said. She placed her hand on the arm of her partner and went out with him.

When the dance was over, she was amazed to see Lord Stansford still in the room. She had expected him to leave, when the son of his host spoke so insultingly to him, but the young man had not departed. He appeared to be enjoying himself immensely, and danced through every dance with the utmost devotion, which rather put to shame many of the young men who lounged against the walls; never once, however, did he come near Miss Linderham until the evening was well on, and then he passed her by accident. She touched him on the arm with her fan, and he looked round quickly.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Linderham?" he said.

"Why have you ignored me all the evening?" she asked, looking at him with sparkling eyes.

"I haven't ignored you," he replied, with some embarrassment; "I did not know you were here."

"Oh, that is worse than ignoring," replied Miss Linderham, with a laugh; "but now that you do know I am here, I wish you to take me into the garden. It is becoming insufferably hot in here."

"Yes," said the young man, getting red in the face, "it is warm."

The girl could not help noticing his reluctance, but nevertheless she took his arm, and they passed through several rooms to the terrace which faced the garden. Lord Stansford's anxious eyes again seemed to search the rooms through which they passed, and again, on encountering those of Billy Heckle, Miss Linderham's escort shivered slightly as he passed on. The girl wondered what mystery was at the bottom of all this, and with feminine curiosity resolved to find out, even if she had to ask Lord Stansford himself. They sauntered along one of the walks until they reached a seat far from the house. The music floated out to them through the open windows, faint in the distance. Miss Linderham sat down and motioned Lord Stansford to sit beside her. "Now," she said, turning her handsome face full upon him, "why have you avoided me all the evening?"

"I haven't avoided you," he said.

"Tut, tut, you mustn't contradict a lady, you know. I want the reason, the real reason, and no excuses."

Before the young man could reply, Billy Heckle, his face flushed with wine or anger, or perhaps both, strode down the path and confronted them.

"I gave you your warning," he cried.

Lord Stansford sprang to his feet; Miss Linderham arose also, and looked in some alarm from one young man to the other.

"Stop a moment, Heckle; don't say a word, and I will meet you where you like afterwards," hurriedly put in his lordship.

"Afterwards is no good to me," answered Heckle. "I gave you the tip, and you haven't followed it."

"I beg you to remember," said Stansford, in a low voice with a tremor in it, "there is a lady present."

Miss Linderham turned to go.

"Stop a moment," cried Heckle; "do you know who this man is?"

Miss Linderham stopped, but did not answer.

"I'll tell you who he is: he is a hired guest. My father pays five guineas for his presence here to-night, and every place you have met him, he has been there on hire. That's the kind of man Lord Stansford is. I told you I should expose you. Now I am going to tell the others."

Lord Stansford's face was as white as paper. His teeth were clinched, and taking one quick step forward, he smote Heckle fair between the two eyes and felled him to the ground.

"You cur!" he cried. "Get up, or I shall kick you, and hate myself ever after for doing it."

Young Heckle picked himself up, cursing under his breath.

"I'll settle with you, my man," he cried; "I'll get a policeman. You'll spend the remainder of this night in the cells."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," answered Lord Stansford, catching him by both wrists with an iron grasp. "Now pay attention to me, Billy Heckle: you feel my grip on your wrist; you felt my blow in your face, didn't you? Now you go into the house by whatever back entrance there is, go to your room, wash the blood off your face, and stay there, otherwise, by God, I'll break both of your wrists as you stand here," and he gave the wrists a wrench that made the other wince, big and bulky as he was.

"I promise," said Heckle.

"Very well, see that you keep your promise."

Young Heckle slunk away, and Lord Stansford turned to Miss Linderham, who stood looking on, speechless with horror and surprise.

"What a brute you are!" she cried, her under lip quivering.

"Yes," he replied quietly. "Most of us men are brutes when you take a little of the varnish off. Won't you sit down, Miss Linderham? There is no need now to reply to the question you asked me: the incident you have witnessed, and what you have heard, has been its answer."

The young lady did not sit down; she stood looking at him, her eyes softening a trifle.

"Is it true, then?" she cried.

"Is what true?"

"That you are here as a hired guest?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Then why did you knock him down, if it was the truth?"

"Because he spoke the truth before you."

"I hope, Lord Stansford, you don't mean to imply that I am in any way responsible for your ruffianism?"

"You are, and in more than one sense of the word. That young fellow threatened me when I came here to-night, knowing that I was his father's hired guest; I did not wish exposure, and so I avoided you. You spoke to me, and asked me to bring you out here. I came, knowing that if Heckle saw me he would carry out his threat. He has carried it out, and I have had the pleasure of knocking him down."

Miss Linderham sank upon the seat, and once more motioned with her fan for him to take the place beside her.

"Then you receive five guineas a night for appearing at the different places where I have met you?"

"As a matter of fact," said Stansford, "I get only two guineas. I suppose the other three, if such is the price paid, goes to my employers."

"I thought Mr. Heckle was your employer tonight?"

"I mean to the company who let me out, if I make myself clear; Spink and Company. Telephone 100,803. If you should ever want an eligible guest for any entertainment you give, and men are scarce, you have only to telephone them, and they will send me to you."

"Oh, I see," said Miss Linderham, tapping her knee with the fan.

"It is only justice to my fellow employés," continued Lord Stansford, "to say that I believe they are all eligible young men, but many of them may be had for a guinea. The charge in my case is higher as I have a title. I have tried to flatter myself that it was my polished, dignified manner that won me the extra remuneration; but after your exclamation on my brutality to-night, I am afraid I must fall back on my title. We members of the aristocracy come high, you know."

There was silence between them for a few moments, and then the girl looked up at him and said—

"Aren't you ashamed of your profession, Lord Stansford?"

"Yes," replied Lord Stansford, "I am."

"Then why do you follow it?"

"Why does a man sweep a street-crossing? Lack of money. One must have money, you know, to get along in this world; and I, alas, have none. I had a little once; I wanted to make it more, so gambled—and lost. I laid low for a couple of years, and saw none of my old acquaintances; but it was no use, there was nothing I could turn my hand to. This profession, as you call it, led me back into my old set again. It is true that many of the houses I frequented before my disaster overtook me, do not hire guests. I am more in demand by the new-rich, like Heckle here, who, with his precious son, does not know how to treat a guest, even when that guest is hired."

"But I should think," said Miss Linderham, "that a man like you would go to South Africa or Australia, where there are great things to be done. I imagine, from the insight I have had into your character, you would make a good fighter. Why don't you go where fighting is appreciated, and where they do not call a

policeman?"

"I have often thought of it, Miss Linderham, but you see, to secure an appointment, one needs to have a certain amount of influence, and be able to pass examinations, I can't pass an examination in anything. I have quarrelled with all my people, and have no influence. To tell you the truth, I am saving up money now in the hope of being able to buy an outfit to go to the Cape."

"You would much rather be in London, though, I suppose?"

"Yes, if I had a reasonably good income."

"Are you open to a fair offer?"

"What do you mean by a fair offer?"

"I mean, would you entertain a proposal in your present line of business with increased remuneration?"

The young man sat silent for a few moments and did not look at his companion. When he spoke there was a shade of resentment in his voice.

"I thought you saw, Miss Linderham, that I was not very proud of my present occupation."

"No, but, as you said, a man will do anything for money."

"I beg your pardon for again contradicting you, but I never said anything of the sort."

"I thought you did, when you were speaking of the crossing-sweeping; but never mind, I know a lady who has plenty of money; she is an artist; at least, she thinks she is one, and wishes to devote her life to art. She is continually pestered by offers of marriage, and she knows these offers come to her largely because of her money. Now, this lady wishes to marry a man, and will settle upon him two thousand pounds a year. Would you be willing to accept that offer if I got you an introduction?"

"It would depend very much on the lady," said Stansford.

"Oh no, it wouldn't; for you would have nothing whatever to do with her, except that you would be her hired husband. She wants to devote herself to painting, not to you—don't you understand? and so long as you did not trouble her, you could enjoy your two thousand pounds a year. You, perhaps, might have to appear at some of the receptions she would give, and I have no doubt she would add five guineas an evening for your presence. That would be an extra, you know."

There was a long silence between them after Maggie Linderham ceased speaking. The young man kicked the gravel with his toes, and his eyes were bent upon the path before him. "He is thinking it over," said Miss Linderham to herself. At last Lord Stansford looked up, with a sigh.

"Did you see the late scuffle between the unfortunate Heckle and myself?"

"Did I see it?" she asked. "How could I help seeing it?"

"Ah, then, did you notice that when he was down I helped him up?"

"Yes; and threatened to break his wrists when you got him up."

"Quite so. I should have done it, too, if he had not promised. But what I wanted to call your attention to, was the fact that he was standing up when I struck him, and I want also to impress upon you the other fact, that I did not hit him when he was down. Did you notice that?"

"Of course, I noticed it. No man would hit another when he was down."

"I am very glad, Miss Linderham, that you recognise it as a code of honour with us men, brutes as we are. Don't you think a woman should be equally generous?"

"Certainly; but I don't see what you mean."

"I mean this, Miss Linderham, that your offer is hitting me when I'm down."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Linderham, in dismay. "I'm sure I beg your pardon; I did not look at it in that light."

"Oh, it doesn't matter very much," said Stansford, rising; "it's all included in the two guineas, but I'm pleased to think I have some self- respect left, and that I can refuse your lady, and will not become a hired husband at two thousand pounds a

year. May I see you back to the house, Miss Linderham? As you are well aware, I have duties towards other guests who are not hired, and it is a point of honour with me to earn my money. I wouldn't like a complaint to reach the ears of Spink and Company."

Miss Linderham rose and placed her hand within his arm.

"Telephone, what number?" she asked.

"Telephone 100,803," he answered. "I am sorry the firm did not provide me with some of their cards when I was at the office this afternoon."

"It doesn't matter," said Miss Linderham; "I will remember," and they entered the house together.

Next day, at a large studio in Kensington, none of the friends who had met Miss Linderham at the ball the evening before would have recognised the girl; not but what she was as pretty as ever, perhaps a little prettier, with her long white pinafore and her pretty fingers discoloured by the crayons she was using. She was trying to sketch upon the canvas before her the figure of a man, striking out from the shoulder, and she did not seem to have much success with her drawing, perhaps because she had no model, and perhaps because her mind was pre-occupied. She would sit for a long time staring at the canvas, then jump up and put in lines which did not appear to bring the rough sketch any nearer perfection.

The room was large, with a good north window, and scattered about were the numberless objects that go to the confusing make-up of an artist's workshop. At last Miss Linderham threw down her crayon, went to the end of the room where a telephone hung, and rang the bell.

"Give me," she said, "100,803."

After a few moments of waiting, a voice came.

"Is that Spink and Company?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," was the reply.

"You have in your employ Lord Stansford, I think?"

"Yes, madam."

"Is he engaged for this afternoon?"

"No, madam."

"Well, send him to Miss Linderham, No. 2,044, Cromwell Road, South Kensington."

The man at the other end wrote the address, and then asked—

"At what hour, madam?"

"I want him from four till six o'clock."

"Very well, madam, we shall send him."

"Now," said Miss Linderham, with a sigh of relief, "I can have a model who will strike the right attitude. It is so difficult to draw from memory."

The reason why so many women fail as artists, as well as in many other professions, may be because they pay so much attention to their own dress. It is an astonishing fact to record that Miss Linderham sent out for a French hairdresser, who was a most expensive man, and whom she generally called in only when some very important function was about to take place.

"I want you," she said, "to dress my hair in an artistic way, and yet in a manner that it will seem as if no particular trouble had been taken. Do you understand me?"

"Ah, perfectly, mademoiselle," said the polite Frenchman. "You shall be so fascinating, mademoiselle, that——"

"Yes," said Miss Linderham, "that is what I want."

At three o'clock she had on a dainty gown. The sleeves were turned up, as if she were ready for the most serious work. The spotless pinafore which covered this dress had the most fetching little frill around it; all in all, it was doubtful if any studio in London, even one belonging to the most celebrated painter, had in it as pretty a picture as Miss Maggie Linderham was that afternoon. At three o'clock

there came a ring at the telephone, and when Miss Linderham answered the call, the voice which she had heard before said—

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, madam, but Lord Stansford resigned this afternoon. We could send you another man if you liked to have him."

"No, no!" cried Miss Linderham; and the man at the other end of the telephone actually thought she was weeping.

"No, I don't want any one else. It doesn't really matter."

"The other man," replied the voice, "would be only two guineas, and it was five for Lord Stansford. We could send you a man for a guinea, although we don't recommend him."

"No," said Miss Linderham, "I don't want anybody. I am glad Lord Stansford is not coming, as the little party I proposed to give, has been postponed."

"Ah, then, when it does come off, madam, I hope——"

But Miss Linderham hung up the receiver, and did not listen to the recommendations the man was sending over the wire about his hired guests. The chances are that Maggie Linderham would have cried had it not been that her hair was so nicely, yet carelessly, done; but before she had time to make up her mind what to do, the trim little maid came along the gallery and down the steps into the studio, with a silver salver in her hand, and on it a card, which she handed to Miss Linderham, who picked up the card and read, "Richard Stansford."

"Oh," she cried joyfully, "ask him to come here."

"Won't you see him in the drawing-room, miss?"

"No, no; tell him I am very busy, and bring him to the studio."

The maid went up the stair again. Miss Linderham, taking one long, careful glance at herself, looking over her shoulder in the tall mirror, and not caring to touch her wealth of hair, picked up her crayon and began making the sketch of the striking man even worse than it was before. She did not look round until she heard Lord Stansford's step on the stair, then she gave an exclamation of surprise

on seeing him. The young man was dressed in a wide-awake hat, and the costume which we see in the illustrated papers as picturing our friends in South Africa. All he needed was a belt of cartridges and a rifle to make the picture complete.

"This is hardly the dress a man is supposed to wear in London when he makes an afternoon call on a lady, Miss Linderham," said the young man, with a laugh, "but I had either to come this way or not at all, for my time is very limited. I thought it was too bad to leave the country without giving you an opportunity to apologise for your conduct last night, and for the additional insult of hiring me for two hours this afternoon. And so, you see, I came."

"I am very glad you did," replied Miss Linderham. "I was much disappointed when they telephoned me this afternoon that you had resigned. I must say that you look exceedingly well in that outfit, Lord Stansford."

"Yes," said the young man, casting a glance over himself; "I am compelled to admit that it is rather becoming. I have had the pleasure of attracting a good deal of attention as I came along the street."

"They took you for a cowboy, I suppose?"

"Well, something of that sort. The small boy, I regret to say, was so unfeeling as to sing 'He's got 'em on,' and other ribald ditties of that kind, which they seemed to think suited the occasion. But others looked at me with great respect, which compensated for the disadvantages. Will you pardon the rudeness of a pioneer, Miss Linderham, when I say that you look even more charming in the studio dress than you did in ball costume, and I never thought that could be possible?"

"Oh," cried the girl, flushing, perhaps, because the crimson paint on the palette she had picked up reflected on her cheek. "You must excuse this working garb, as I did not expect visitors. You see, they telephoned me that you were not coming."

The deluded young man actually thought this statement was correct, which in part it was, and he believed also that the luxuriant hair tossed up here and there with seeming carelessness was not the result of an art far superior to any the girl herself had ever put upon canvas.

"So you are off to South Africa?" she said.

"Yes, the Cape."

"Oh, is the Cape in South Africa?"

"Well, I think so," replied the young man, somewhat dubiously, "but I wouldn't be certain about it, though the steamship company guarantee to land me at the Cape, wherever it is."

The girl laughed.

"You must have given it a great deal of thought," she said, "when you don't really know where you are going."

"Oh, I have a better idea of direction than you give me credit for. I am not such a fool as I looked last night, you know; then I belonged to Spink and Company, and was sublet by them to old Heckle; now I belong to myself and South Africa. That makes a world of difference, you know."

"I see it does," replied Miss Linderham. "Won't you sit down?"

The girl herself sank into an armchair, while Stansford sat on a low table, swinging one foot to and fro, his wide-brimmed hat thrown back, and gazed at the girl until she reddened more than ever. Neither spoke for some moments.

"Do you know," said Stansford at last, "that when I look at you South Africa seems a long distance away!"

"I thought it was a long distance away," said the girl, without looking up.

"Yes; but it's longer and more lonely when one looks at you. By Jove, if I thought I couldn't do better, I would be tempted to take that two thousand a year offer of yours and——"

"It wasn't an offer of mine," cried the girl hastily. "Perhaps the lady I was thinking of wouldn't have agreed to it, even if I had spoken to her about it."

"That is quite true; still, I think if she had seen me in this outfit she would have thought me worth the money."

"You think you can make more than two thousand a year out in South Africa?

You have become very hopeful all in a moment. It seems to me that a man who thinks he can make two thousand a year is very foolish to let himself out at two guineas an evening."

"Do you know, Miss Linderham, that was just what I thought myself, and I told the respectable Spink so, too. I told him I had had an offer of two thousand a year in his own line of business. He said that no firm in London could afford the money. 'Why,' he cried, waxing angry, 'I could get a Duke for that.'"

"'Well,' I replied, 'it is purely a matter of business with me. I was offered two thousand pounds a year as ornamental man by a most charming young lady, who has a studio in South Kensington, and who is herself, when dressed up as an artist, prettier than any picture that ever entered the Royal Academy'; that's what I told Spink."

The girl looked up at him, first with indignation in her eyes, and then with a smile hovering about her pretty lips.

"You said nothing of the sort," she answered, "for you knew nothing about this studio at that time, so you see I am not going to emulate your dishonesty by pretending not to know you are referring to me."

"My dishonesty!" exclaimed the young man, with protest in his voice. "I am the most honest, straightforward person alive, and I believe I would take your two thousand a year offer if I didn't think I could do better."

"Where, in South Africa?"

"No, in South Kensington. I think that when the lady learns how useful I could be around a studio—oh, I could learn to wash brushes, sweep out the room, prepare canvases, light the fire; and how nicely I could hand around cups of tea when she had her 'At Homes,' and exhibited her pictures! When she realises this, and sees what a bargain she is getting, I feel almost certain she will not make any terms at all."

The young man sprang from the table, and the girl rose from her chair, a look almost of alarm in her face. He caught her by the arms.

"What do you think, Miss Linderham? You know the lady. Don't you think she would refuse to have anything to do with a cad like Billy Heckle, rich as he is,

and would prefer a humble, hard-working farmer from the Cape?"

The girl did not answer his question.

"Are you going to break my arms as you threatened to do his wrists last night?"

"Maggie," he whispered, in a low voice, with an intense ring in it, "I am going to break nothing but my own heart if you refuse me."

The girl looked up at him with a smile.

"I knew when you came in you weren't going to South Africa, Dick," was all she said; and he, taking advantage of her helplessness, kissed her.

PURIFICATION.

Eugène Caspilier sat at one of the metal tables of the Café Égalité, allowing the water from the carafe to filter slowly through a lump of sugar and a perforated spoon into his glass of absinthe. It was not an expression of discontent that was to be seen on the face of Caspilier, but rather a fleeting shade of unhappiness which showed he was a man to whom the world was being unkind. On the opposite side of the little round table sat his friend and sympathising companion, Henri Lacour. He sipped his absinthe slowly, as absinthe should be sipped, and it was evident that he was deeply concerned with the problem that confronted his comrade.

"Why, in Heaven's name, did you marry her? That, surely, was not necessary."

Eugène shrugged his shoulders. The shrug said plainly, "Why, indeed?
Ask me an easier one."

For some moments there was silence between the two. Absinthe is not a liquor to be drunk hastily, or even to be talked over too much in the drinking. Henri did not seem to expect any other reply than the expressive shrug, and each man consumed his beverage dreamily, while the absinthe, in return for this thoughtful consideration, spread over them its benign influence, gradually lifting from their minds all care and worry, dispersing the mental clouds that hover over all men at times, thinning the fog until it disappeared, rather than rolling the vapour away, as the warm sun dissipates into invisibility the opaque morning mists, leaving nothing but clear air, all round, and a blue sky overhead.

"A man must live," said Caspilier at last; "and the profession of decadent poet is not a lucrative one. Of course there is undying fame in the future, but then we must have our absinthe in the present. Why did I marry her, you ask? I was the victim of my environment. I must write poetry; to write poetry, I must live; to live, I must have money; to get money, I was forced to marry. Valdorême is one

of the best pastry-cooks in Paris; is it my fault, then, that the Parisians have a greater love for pastry than for poetry? Am I to blame that her wares are more sought for at her shop than are mine at the booksellers'? I would willingly have shared the income of the shop with her without the folly of marriage, but Valdorême has strange, barbaric notions which were not overturnable by civilised reason. Still my action was not wholly mercenary, nor indeed mainly so. There was a rhythm about her name that pleased me. Then she is a Russian, and my country and hers were at that moment in each other's arms, so I proposed to Valdorême that we follow the national example. But, alas! Henri, my friend, I find that even ten years' residence in Paris will not eliminate the savage from the nature of a Russian. In spite of the name that sounds like the soft flow of a rich mellow wine, my wife is little better than a barbarian. When I told her about Tenise, she acted like a mad woman— drove me into the streets."

"But why did you tell her about Tenise?"

"*Pourquoi?* How I hate that word! Why! Why!! Why!!! It dogs one's actions like a bloodhound, eternally yelping for a reason. It seems to me that a11 my life I have had to account to an inquiring why. I don't know why I told her; it did not appear to be a matter requiring any thought or consideration. I spoke merely because Tenise came into my mind at the moment. But after that, the deluge; I shudder when I think of it."

"Again the why?" said the poet's friend. "Why not cease to think of conciliating your wife? Russians are unreasoning aborigines. Why not take up life in a simple poetic way with Tenise, and avoid the Rue de Russie altogether?"

Caspilier sighed gently. Here fate struck him hard. "Alas! my friend, it is impossible. Tenise is an artist's model, and those brutes of painters who get such prices for their daubs, pay her so little each week that her wages would hardly keep me in food and drink. My paper, pens, and ink I can get at the cafés, but how am I to clothe myself? If Valdorême would but make us a small allowance, we could be so happy. Valdorême is madame, as I have so often told her, and she owes me something for that; but she actually thinks that because a man is married he should come dutifully home like a bourgeois grocer. She has no poetry, no sense of the needs of a literary man, in her nature."

Lacour sorrowfully admitted that the situation had its embarrassments. The first glass of absinthe did not show clearly how they were to be met, but the second

brought bravery with it, and he nobly offered to beard the Russian lioness in her den, explain the view Paris took of her unjustifiable conduct, and, if possible, bring her to reason.

Caspilier's emotion overcame him, and he wept silently, while his friend, in eloquent language, told how famous authors, whose names were France's proudest possession, had been forgiven by their wives for slight lapses from strict domesticity, and these instances, he said, he would recount to Madame Valdorême, and so induce her to follow such illustrious examples.

The two comrades embraced and separated; the friend to use his influence and powers of persuasion with Valdorême; the husband to tell Tenise how blessed they were in having such a friend to intercede for them; for Tenise, bright little Parisienne that she was, bore no malice against the unreasonable wife of her lover.

Henri Lacour paused opposite the pastry-shop on the Rue de Russie that bore the name of "Valdorême" over the temptingly filled windows. Madame Caspilier had not changed the title of her well-known shop when she gave up her own name. Lacour caught sight of her serving her customers, and he thought she looked more like a Russian princess than a shopkeeper. He wondered now at the preference of his friend for the petite black-haired model. Valdorême did not seem more than twenty; she was large, and strikingly handsome, with abundant auburn hair that was almost red. Her beautifully moulded chin denoted perhaps too much firmness, and was in striking contrast to the weakness of her husband's lower face. Lacour almost trembled as she seemed to flash one look directly at him, and, for a moment, he feared she had seen him loitering before the window. Her eyes were large, of a limpid amber colour, but deep within them smouldered a fire that Lacour felt he would not care to see blaze up. His task now wore a different aspect from what it had worn in front of the Café Égalité. Hesitating a moment, he passed the shop, and, stopping at a neighbouring café, ordered another glass of absinthe. It is astonishing how rapidly the genial influence of this stimulant departs!

Fortified once again, he resolved to act before his courage had time to evaporate, and so, goading himself on with the thought that no man should be afraid to meet any woman, be she Russian or civilised, he entered the shop, making his most polite bow to Madame Caspilier.

"I have come, madame," he began, "as the friend of your husband, to talk with you regarding his affairs."

"Ah!" said Valdorême; and Henri saw with dismay the fires deep down in her eyes rekindle. But she merely gave some instructions to an assistant, and, turning to Lacour, asked him to be so good as to follow her.

She led him through the shop and up a stair at the back, throwing open a door on the first floor. Lacour entered a neat drawing-room, with windows opening out upon the street. Madame Caspilier seated herself at a table, resting her elbow upon it, shading her eyes with her hand, and yet Lacour felt them searching his very soul.

"Sit down," she said. "You are my husband's friend. What have you to say?"

Now, it is a difficult thing for a man to tell a beautiful woman that her husband—for the moment—prefers some one else, so Lacour began on generalities. He said a poet might be likened to a butterfly, or perhaps to the more industrious bee, who sipped honey from every flower, and so enriched the world. A poet was a law unto himself, and should not be judged harshly from what might be termed a shopkeeping point of view. Then Lacour, warming to his work, gave many instances where the wives of great men had condoned and even encouraged their husbands' little idiosyncrasies, to the great augmenting of our most valued literature.

Now and then, as this eloquent man talked, Valdorême's eyes seemed to flame dangerously in the shadow, but the woman neither moved nor interrupted him while he spoke. When he had finished, her voice sounded cold and unimpassioned, and he felt with relief that the outbreak he had feared was at least postponed.

"You would advise me then," she began, "to do as the wife of that great novelist did, and invite my husband and the woman he admires to my table?"

"Oh, I don't say I could ask you to go so far as that," said Lacour; "but——"

"I'm no halfway woman. It is all or nothing with me. If I invited my husband to dine with me, I would also invite this creature—What is her name? Tenise, you say. Well, I would invite her too. Does she know he is a married man?"

"Yes," cried Lacour eagerly; "but I assure you, madame, she has nothing but the kindliest feelings towards you. There is no jealousy about Tenise."

"How good of her! How very good of her!" said the Russian woman, with such bitterness that Lacour fancied uneasily that he had somehow made an injudicious remark, whereas all his efforts were concentrated in a desire to conciliate and please.

"Very well," said Valdorême, rising. "You may tell my husband that you have been successful in your mission. Tell him that I will provide for them both. Ask them to honour me with their presence at breakfast to- morrow morning at twelve o'clock. If he wants money, as you say, here are two hundred francs, which will perhaps be sufficient for his wants until midday to-morrow."

Lacour thanked her with a profuse graciousness that would have delighted any ordinary giver, but Valdorême stood impassive like a tragedy queen, and seemed only anxious that he should speedily take his departure, now that his errand was done.

The heart of the poet was filled with joy when he heard from his friend that at last Valdorême had come to regard his union with Tenise in the light of reason. Caspilier, as he embraced Lacour, admitted that perhaps there was something to be said for his wife after all.

The poet dressed himself with more than usual care on the day of the feast, and Tenise, who accompanied him, put on some of the finery that had been bought with Valdorême's donation. She confessed that she thought Eugène's wife had acted with consideration towards them, but maintained that she did not wish to meet her, for, judging from Caspilier's account, his wife must be a somewhat formidable and terrifying person; still she went with him, she said, solely through good nature, and a desire to heal family differences. Tenise would do anything in the cause of domestic peace.

The shop assistant told the pair, when they had dismissed the cab, that madame was waiting for them upstairs. In the drawing-room Valdorême was standing with her back to the window like a low-browed goddess, her tawny hair loose over her shoulders, and the pallor of her face made more conspicuous by her costume of unrelieved black. Caspilier, with the grace characteristic of him, swept off his hat, and made a low, deferential bow; but when he straightened

himself up, and began to say the complimentary things and poetical phrases he had put together for the occasion at the café the night before, the lurid look of the Russian made his tongue falter; and Tenise, who had never seen a woman of this sort before, laughed a nervous, half-frightened little laugh, and clung closer to her lover than before. The wife was even more forbidding than she had imagined. Valdorême shuddered slightly when she saw this intimate movement on the part of her rival, and her hand clenched and unclenched convulsively.

"Come," she said, cutting short her husband's halting harangue, and sweeping past them, drawing her skirts aside on nearing Tenise, she led the way up to the dining-room a floor higher.

"I'm afraid of her," whimpered Tenise, holding back. "She will poison us."

"Nonsense," said Caspilier, in a whisper. "Come along. She is too fond of me to attempt anything of that kind, and you are safe when I am here."

Valdorême sat at the head of the table, with her husband at her right hand and Tenise on her left. The breakfast was the best either of them had ever tasted. The hostess sat silent, but no second talker was needed when the poet was present. Tenise laughed merrily now and then at his bright sayings, for the excellence of the meal had banished her fears of poison.

"What penetrating smell is this that fills the room? Better open the window," said Caspilier.

"It is nothing," replied Valdorême, speaking for the first time since they had sat down. "It is only naphtha. I have had this room cleaned with it. The window won't open, and if it would, we could not hear you talk with the noise from the street."

The poet would suffer anything rather than have his eloquence interfered with, so he said no more about the fumes of naphtha. When the coffee was brought in, Valdorême dismissed the trim little maid who had waited on them.

"I have some of your favourite cigarettes here. I will get them."

She arose, and, as she went to the table on which the boxes lay, she quietly and deftly locked the door, and, pulling out the key, slipped it into her pocket.

"Do you smoke, mademoiselle?" she asked, speaking to Tenise. She had not recognised her presence before.

"Sometimes, madame," answered the girl, with a titter.

"You will find these cigarettes excellent. My husband's taste in cigarettes is better than in many things. He prefers the Russian to the French."

Caspilier laughed loudly.

"That's a slap at you, Tenise," he said.

"At me? Not so; she speaks of cigarettes, and I myself prefer the Russian, only they are so expensive."

A look of strange eagerness came into Valdorême's expressive face, softened by a touch of supplication. Her eyes were on her husband, but she said rapidly to the girl——"

"Stop a moment, mademoiselle. Do not light your cigarette until I give the word."

Then to her husband she spoke beseechingly in Russian, a language she had taught him in the early months of their marriage.

"Eugenio, Eugenio! Don't you see the girl's a fool? How can you care for her? She would be as happy with the first man she met in the street. I—I think only of you. Come back to me, Eugenio."

She leaned over the table towards him, and in her vehemence clasped his wrist. The girl watched them both with a smile. It reminded her of a scene in an opera she had heard once in a strange language. The prima donna had looked and pleaded like Valdorême.

Caspilier shrugged his shoulders, but did not withdraw his wrist from her firm grasp.

"Why go over the whole weary ground again?" he said. "If it were not Tenise, it would be somebody else. I was never meant for a constant husband, Val. I understood from Lacour that we were to have no more of this nonsense."

She slowly relaxed her hold on his unresisting wrist. The old, hard, tragic look came into her face as she drew a deep breath. The fire in the depths of her amber eyes rekindled, as the softness went out of them.

"You may light your cigarette now, mademoiselle," she said almost in a whisper to Tenise.

"I swear I could light mine in your eyes, Val.," cried her husband. "You would make a name for yourself on the stage. I will write a tragedy for you, and we will ____"

Tenise struck the match. A simultaneous flash of lightning and clap of thunder filled the room. The glass in the window fell clattering into the street. Valdorême was standing with her back against the door. Tenise, fluttering her helpless little hands before her, tottered shrieking to the broken window. Caspilier, staggering panting to his feet, gasped—

"You Russian devil! The key, the key!"

He tried to clutch her throat, but she pushed him back.

"Go to your Frenchwoman. She's calling for help."

Tenise sank by the window, one burning arm over the sill, and was silent. Caspilier, mechanically beating back the fire from his shaking head, whimpering and sobbing, fell against the table, and then went headlong on the floor.

Valdorême, a pillar, of fire, swaying gently to and fro before the door, whispered in a voice of agony—

"Oh, Eugene, Eugene!" and flung herself like a flaming angel—or fiend —on the prostrate form of the man.

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