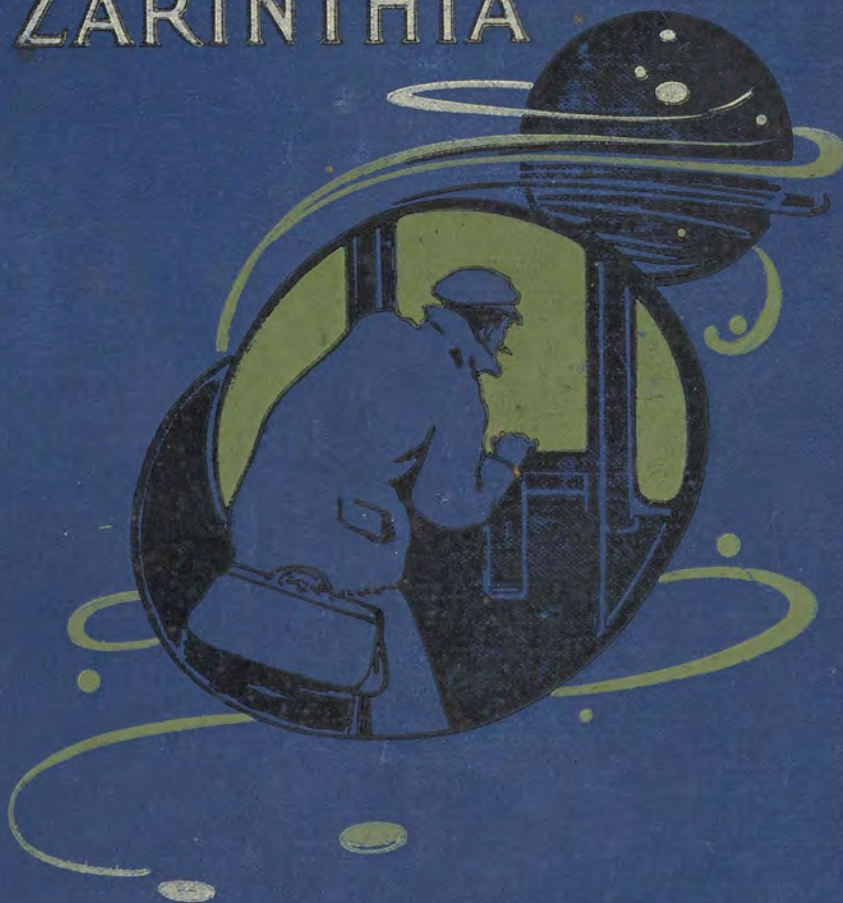


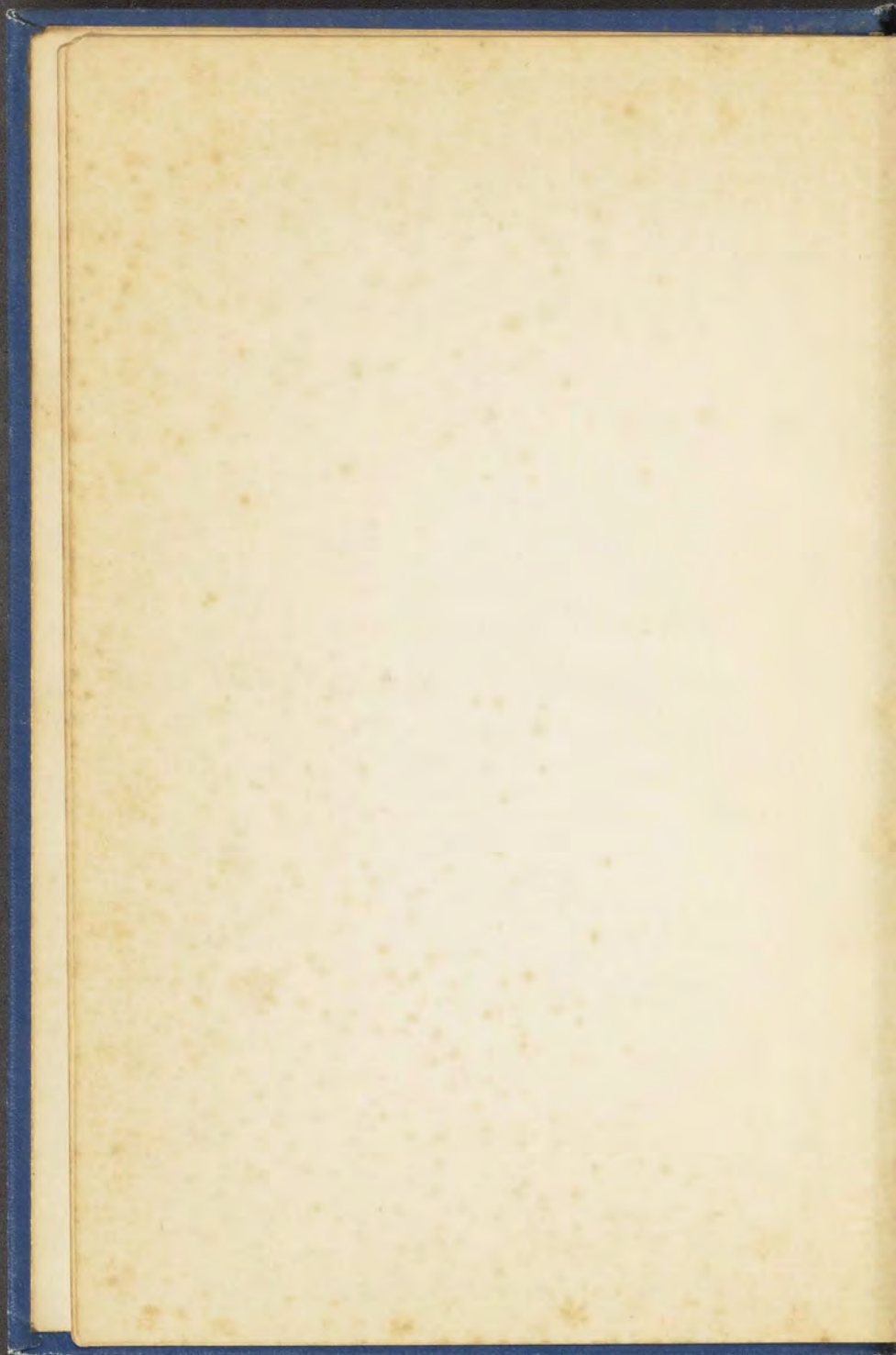
THE · LOST  
EMERALDS · OF  
ZARINTHIA



by

HENRY BEAUCHAMP

THE LOST EMERALDS OF ZARINTHIA.



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# THE LOST EMERALDS

OF

## ZARINTHIA

*A ROMANCE OF TO-DAY*

BY

HENRY BEAUCHAMP

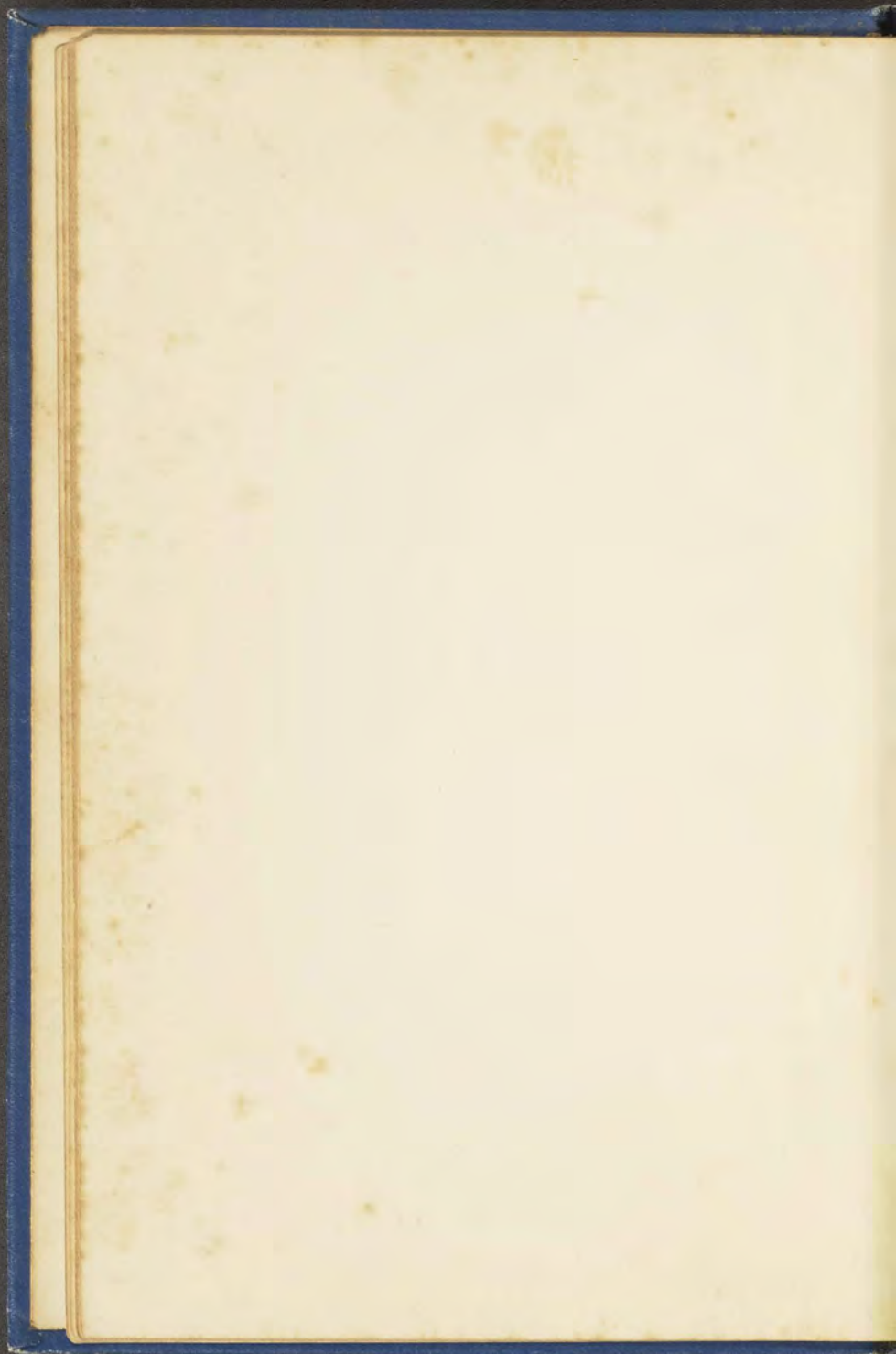
“The boundary between the Probable and the Possible  
has never yet been determined.”—METTERNICH

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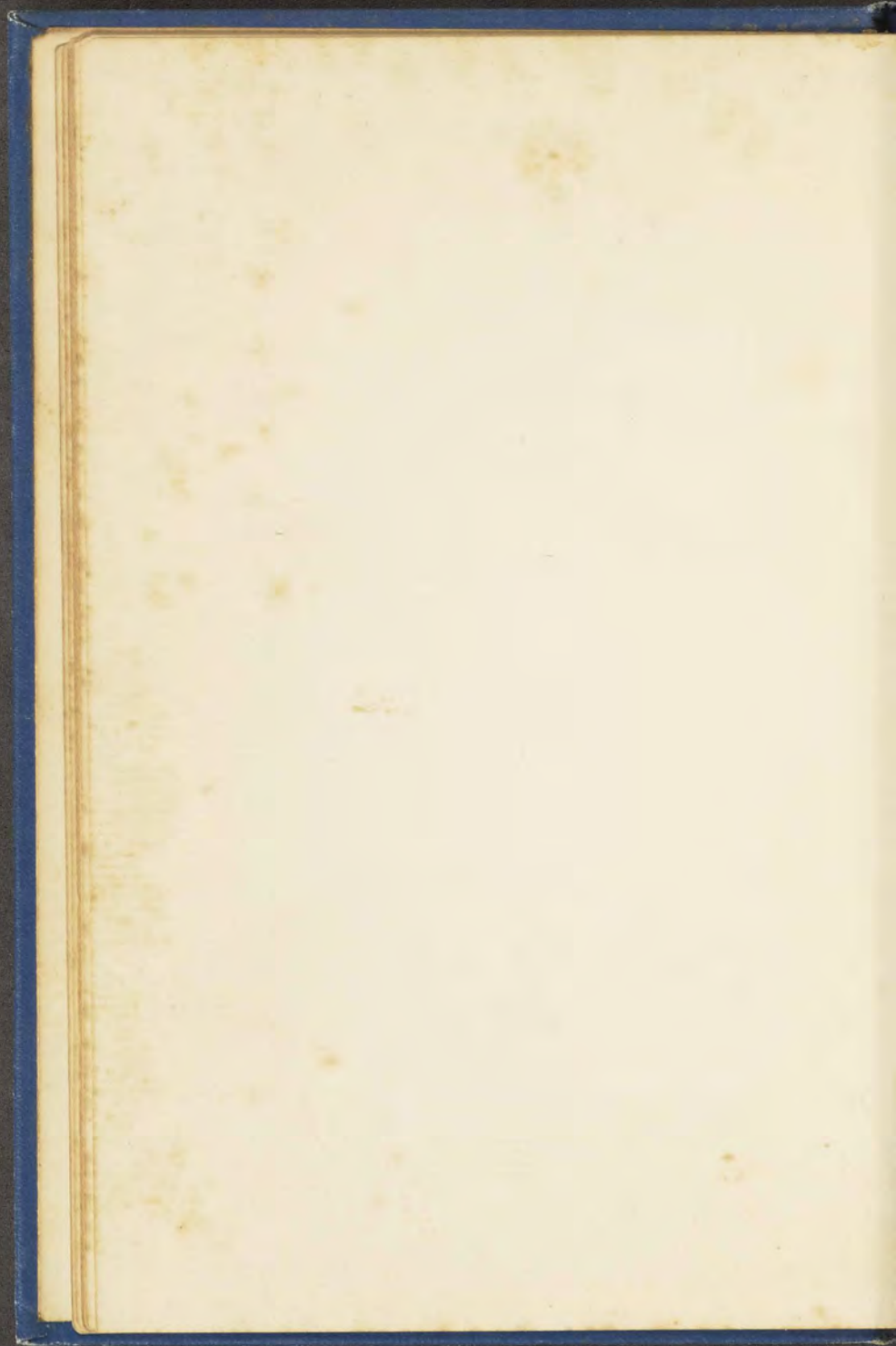
TO  
SIR HENRY POTTINGER, BARONET,  
THIS STORY IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY  
THE AUTHOR.



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# THE LOST EMERALDS OF ZARINTHIA.

## CHAPTER I.

### *A TRUSTWORTHY MISSION.*

TEN years ago I was in the employ of Barbican & Co., the well-known Court jewellers, and stood in a fair way of improving my position with the firm, which really consisted of only one individual, Mr. Jenkin Barbican. He and my father had been lifelong friends, and although the latter, I regret to say, lost all his money on the Stock Exchange, he still kept the esteem and goodwill of his old schoolfellow. Mr. Barbican not only took me into his business, but gradually advanced me to a position of great responsibility, one which my employer somewhat grandiloquently described as that of "Special Commissioner."

Briefly, I was entirely in Mr. Barbican's confidence, and when any large sale or purchase, demanding considerable tact and knowledge, was about to be effected, the matter was invariably placed in my hands. I daresay that the trust reposed in me made me over-sanguine and not a little conceited. I had a good salary—£450 a year and expenses—and Mr. Barbican had hinted more than once that, if Mr. Harry Holdsworth (myself) behaved himself, he might eventually be taken into partnership. This was the more reasonable since I was engaged to Hetty Cameron, Mr. Barbican's favourite niece, who lived with him and kept house for the old bachelor. At the period to which I am referring we had been engaged over three years, and as Hetty was twenty-three and I had turned my twenty-ninth birthday, I thought it about time that we should get married and set up our own establishment. But Mr. Barbican would not agree to this. He said that Hetty's husband must be at least thirty years of age ("arrived at sober maturity" he called it), and have a business of his own or a share in some solid concern. As to what he intended to do for Hetty that was his affair. He had no objection to her being

engaged to young Holdsworth—indeed, he approved of it, inasmuch as the situation prevented his niece from flirting with a dozen young fellows at one and the same time. The fact of the matter was that Mr. Barbican was a very selfish old person, and had no wish to disturb his household arrangements, and I am very sure that I should not have cared to share his home, even as a nephew by marriage. However, when I had completed my three decades, I meant to bring matters to a point, and so did Hetty. I do not know that any description of my sweetheart is necessary. It seems to me foolish, as some men do, to exhaust a jeweller's stock in vaunting the beauties of their lady love—eyes like sapphires, lips like coral, teeth like pearls, and so on. Suffice it to say that Hetty was a fair-haired, Scottish young woman, medium height, healthy complexion, loving, shrewd, like most of her compatriots, and with a tolerable will of her own. She was accomplished in her way—drew well and sang fairly, and above all things delighted in private theatricals. So did I. It was this common taste which first brought us together. I proposed to her in the character of David Garrick, when she was looking her best as Ada Ingot. I may

mention that I never saved a farthing of my income, and I would like all young men to know that long engagements are fatal to habits of economy. Theatre tickets, flowers, excursions up the river, presents, and cabs make terrible inroads on an engaged man's income, that is, if he keeps up his position in the style of the day.

I was sitting in my little office on Maundy Thursday, 1885, studying the part of Caleb Deecie in "The Two Roses," which we, the Philobuskin A.D.C., were to produce on Easter Monday, when the whistle of the call-pipe communicating with Mr. Barbican's room interrupted my rendering of one of the blind lover's most pathetic speeches. Pocketing the play-book, I hastened to ascertain what my principal wanted. I found Mr. Barbican with an open letter before him and an exceedingly gratified look on his face.

"Sit down, Harry," he said benignantly. He called me by my Christian name only when he was in a good temper, and the request to take a chair was also a proof of unwonted benevolence. I began to hope that Mr. Barbican was about to broach the question of my engagement, but he began about some one else's.

“You have heard,” he said pompously, “of the approaching marriage of the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen with Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilda of Trans-Caucasia?”

I replied that I had, and that several of our customers had ordered wedding presents for the nuptials; and I added maliciously, “Don’t you think that they’re rather young to marry—the Grand Duke only twenty-three and the Princess barely eighteen?”

“It is not for us,” said Mr. Barbican severely, “to discuss questions of State policy. We must stick to business. In view of which I may tell you that Princess Mathilda has a very pretty taste for jewellery, and especially for emeralds and diamonds.”

“Then you’d better sell the Grand Duke the Zarinthia set,” I observed, with a touch of sarcasm, knowing that superb necklace to be worth at least £10,000.

“That is precisely what I intend to do with your assistance,” remarked Mr. Barbican calmly. “That is why I have sent for you. This letter is from the Grand Duke’s Marshal of the Household. He says that his August Sovereign having heard that I have for sale the celebrated emerald necklace formed by the ex-Hospodar of Zarinthia is—should

it answer to its reputation—desirous of purchasing the same with the object of presenting the gems to his illustrious bride-elect.”

“The price is rather stiff,” I broke in.

“Stiff, sir!” echoed Mr. Barbican testily. “If you mean by your slang expression that the purchase money will be heavy, you are correct. But allow me to tell you that the Grand Duke is one of the wealthiest potentates in Europe. His mother’s fortune alone was estimated at five million pounds sterling. She was Princess Nathalie of Bessarabia.”

Mr. Barbican studied the *Almanach de Gotha* with the same assiduity as he did the *Peerage*, *Baronetage*, and *County Families* of our native land.

“The Grand Duke,” he continued, “is at the present moment superintending the fitting out of his yacht at Cowes, and I am therefore commanded to despatch the jewels for his inspection on Sunday, the only day which he has at his disposal. You will therefore leave for the Isle of Wight on Saturday afternoon.”

“But,” I stammered, “I’m engaged to dine with you on Sunday, and then there are the theatricals on Monday, and I promised Hetty——”

"I'm afraid," interrupted Mr. Barbican, "that I shall have to forego the pleasure of your society on Sunday. As to the theatricals, you may or may not be back in time to take part in them. Monday being a Bank Holiday I should think not. As to Hetty, I can only say that, if you conduct this affair to my satisfaction, neither you nor she will have cause to complain of my regard for you. You will ask £17,000 for the emeralds, and if necessary descend by fractions to £15,000—not a penny less."

"But you offered them to Lord Stour-and-Avon for £10,000," I exclaimed.

"Lord Stour-and-Avon was not a Grand Duke," said Mr. Barbican coldly. "By the way, his Royal Highness is staying at Solent Castle, which he has leased for the summer. You will see by the letter that he expects the jewels between eleven and twelve on Sunday morning. If you like, you can come and eat your salt fish with us to-morrow. It may make amends for your disappointment on Sunday. Besides, I have the necklace in my private safe at home, and will hand it over to you after dinner. Now, go, and send Perkins to me with his order book."



I left Mr. Barbican's presence in anything but a placid frame of mind. I mentally consigned the Grand Duke and the emeralds to the bottom of the sea. I despatched a sorrowful and indignant letter to Hetty explaining the situation, and I wrote another to Adolphus Whittaker—an unemotional idiot who could no more play Caleb Deecie than fly—begging him to understudy my part in case of accidents. “Hang old Barbican's salt fish!” I cried. “But for that hint about his regard, I'd leave him to fast alone. But then there's Hetty, and her presence would turn pork chops into a feast.”

So I spent Good Friday evening at Buckley Lodge, Clapham, and washed down the salted cod and egg sauce with as good a bottle of claret as old Barbican had in his cellar. Hetty did her very best to cheer me up, but by the time that my host had settled down to his port wine, I began to look upon him quite with the eye of a nephew. He was in capital humour, and when we adjourned to the drawing-room insisted—quite forgetting the day, I suppose—upon singing several ballads of a very sentimental order, which he assured Hetty and myself were far more worthy of presenta-

tion to the public than the feeble productions of modern dramatists. I cordially agreed with him, and suggested that were he to play Eccles in "Caste," and introduce one of his songs, he would make an instantaneous hit. As he had never heard of "Caste," there was no need for Hetty to make despairing grimaces at me behind Mr. Barbican's back. After his minstrelsy my employer remembered business, and, leaving Hetty and myself together, went off to fetch the emeralds from his strong room. It was a curious fad on Mr. Barbican's part always to keep the most valuable gems which he possessed at his private residence, instead of at his business premises. I suppose he was like the fond father of fiction, and loved to have those dearest to him nearest to him.

"Here's a nice state of things," I whispered as the old man closed the door after him.

"Well," said Hetty demurely, "we must make the best of it. After all, what does Sunday's dinner matter when——"

"By Jove, my darling," I broke in, "you've suggested an idea. Quick, the A B C!"

She got the book, and after a brief

survey I cried, "Yes! we can manage it nicely."

"Manage what?" asked Hetty.

"Why, look here, dear, your uncle will expect me to leave Waterloo for Southampton by the 12.50 train. Now, I shan't do anything of the sort. I shall wait for the 3.55 and get to Cowes at seven."

"Why?" she inquired.

"Because, at the time when Mr. Barbican believes that I am speeding on my journey, you and I will be quietly lunching together at Verrey's. Is it a bargain?"

"Oh, Harry! I hardly know. I——"

"Quick! he's coming back. Will you meet me outside Peter Robinson's at half-past twelve sharp?"

Mr. Barbican's grasp was turning the handle of the door as I extracted "yes" from Hetty by a process familiar to many young persons.

My host carried a little black bag in his hand. It had "Deeds" somewhat ostentatiously displayed on one of its sides. It was Mr. Barbican's fallacious idea that any one looking on the "grip sack" would imagine it to be the property of a lawyer. The bag always reminded me of a stage property. Mr. Barbican carefully unlocked it with a

Bramah key and produced a wash-leather bag, from which he took a solid morocco case having on it the letter X surmounted by a Royal crown. This was the trade mark of Prince Xerxes, ex-Hospodar of Zarinthia. Unlocking the case with another key, Mr. Barbican presented to our view a most lovely circlet of enormous emeralds set in diamonds and gold, reposing on a white velvet cushion. Although both Hetty and I had seen the necklace before, we could not repress exclamations of admiration, so transcendently beautiful were the jewels as they flashed in sympathetic light of the electrolier. It was a superb sight.

"They're not to be matched," said Mr. Barbican proudly, "and they're cheap at £18,000."

"I thought you said £17,000," I put in.

"Never mind what I said," replied Mr. Barbican. "Remember what I say now. Look at them, my dear," he added, apostrophising his niece; "feast your eyes on those unequalled works of nature; fancy yourself for a moment the Princess Mathilda, and Harry the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen."

"By all means," said I, falling in with his humour; and taking the necklace from the

case, I fastened it round Hetty's pretty neck. "There, they look better now than they did on the white velvet."

Mr. Barbican saw that his enthusiasm had carried him too far. "Put them back at once," he said anxiously, "and do both you young people remember the enormous trust which I repose in Harry Holdsworth when I confide these jewels to his keeping." He took the circlet from Hetty, placed it in the case, locked it, and, having replaced the wash-leather bag in the leather one, fastened that and handed me the two keys attached to a steel ring depending from a stout chain of the same metal. As he did so, he sighed deeply, as though half regretting the magnanimity of his confidence.

"By the way, Harry," he said to me after a pause, "these cursed holidays begin to-morrow. There will be a rush of tourists to the Isle of Wight. I wish you, if possible, to travel alone. Go over to Waterloo Station and see Mr. Verrinder, and try and get a compartment to yourself. I—that is, the Grand Duke—will, of course, pay for the accommodation—in reason," he added cautiously. "Your train goes at 12.50."

I looked at Hetty, and my left eyelid gave an almost imperceptible droop. My lady love

turned her head away as I did so. Soon afterwards I departed with my precious charge in Mr. Barbican's own brougham, which I defiled with cigar smoke till I arrived at my chambers in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. I called my lodgings "chambers" because the house agent from whom I took them so designated them in our agreement, but the right definition for two poky rooms and a box closet would have been "cells." However, I was my own gaoler, and having sported my oak, I lighted the gas fire, mixed myself a whisky and soda, and deliberated in what fashion it would be possible for me to obtain the maximum figure for the gems. I knew from experience that the stewards of the good and great were not like unto Cæsar's wife, and I thought it possible that Count von Schlittenhagen, Marshal of the Household to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen, might be open to the better kind of persuasion. That night the bag containing the jewels formed the bolster of my bed, and no doubt the gems were the cause of those brilliant dreams in which I figured as Prince Fortunatus, and Hetty as the radiant Princess of the Kingdom of Everlasting Happiness.

At an early hour the next morning I went to Waterloo Station, deposited my small portmanteau in the cloak-room, and interviewed Mr. Verrinder, who was good enough to tell me that he would do his best to reserve a compartment, but that the rush of holiday-makers from London was so great that he could not give me a definite promise. A better manager and kinder-hearted man than Mr. Verrinder I never came across. His death a few years ago was a great loss to all his acquaintances as well as his friends. I need scarcely say that I was accompanied by the bag containing the emeralds. I had attached a chain to it, and this was fastened to a belt round my waist, so that I had no fear of leaving the precious property in a cab or elsewhere. Shortly after midday I entered Verrey's, ordered a glass of sherry and bitters, glanced at the illustrated papers, and had an interesting chat with genial Mr. George Krehl on the subject of Irish terriers. I mention these matters because, as it afterwards transpired, it was a matter of great moment to me to determine where I had spent the whole of that Saturday morning. Punctually as the clocks struck the half-hour, I was on duty outside of Peter Robinson's establishment. Having ordered a very dainty

little luncheon at the restaurant I waited, bag in hand, about a quarter of an hour, not an unreasonable space of time where a lady is concerned. Hetty alighted from her 'bus, looking extremely charming in a grey tailor-made gown and a black straw hat covered with lilacs and green leaves. Being in public, we shook hands lukewarmly.

"Oh, Harry!" she cried, "I hope I'm not very late."

"Not at all," I answered, pulling out my watch. "See, it's only thirteen minutes to one."

"Do you know," she went on, "I shouldn't have been here at all, only I told Uncle Jenkin such a dreadful story all on account of——"

"Eliza?" I broke in.

"No, you, of course," she said, pouting her pretty lips. "I said I had to lunch with Milly Partridge, and go to a concert afterwards at St. James's Hall. So I had, but——"

"You can't, that's all," I said, as we strolled down Regent Street.

"But supposing Milly meets uncle and tells him?" she said, rather piteously. "Besides, I've the stall ticket."



"What time does the concert begin?" I asked.

"A quarter past three," replied Hetty.

"I have it, then," I said triumphantly. "You *can* go to the concert. I'll drop you at St. James's Hall on my way to Waterloo."

We laughed at the simplicity of the plot, and, having gone to Brooks's for a bunch of Parma violets, arrived at Verrey's on the stroke of one. A very merry luncheon we had. I am sure that some of the other guests must have taken us for a couple of lunatics, for ever and anon we would break into theatrical language, and Hetty would become Pauline and I Claude Melnotte, or, by way of contrast, I was Spriggins and she Arabella in "*Içi on parle Français.*" And so on. The only thing that interfered with my perfect enjoyment was the bag, which I had placed on a chair by my side. If I stretched across the table to fill Hetty's glass with champagne, the beastly chain gave me a reminder, and once, when she dropped her fork, I nearly pulled the table cloth off by it. I could appreciate the feelings of Sindbad with regard to the Old Man of the Sea. Of course, Hetty promised that, should I

not return in time, she would be very discreet when playing with Adolphus Whittaker.

“Be demure,” I said passionately, “even cold. Think of me.”

“Only of you!” she responded, and this is what she repeated when I left her at St. James’s Hall at half-past three, “only of you!”

“Only of you!” I repeated time after time as my hansom whirled towards the South Western Railway Terminus.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE TRAIN.

AT Waterloo Station I found a good deal of turmoil and bustle owing to the crowded state of the trains. Nevertheless, Mr. Verrinder, in the midst of his work, found time to speak a good word on my behalf to the guard of the Southampton train, and I flattered myself that I should have the carriage compartment to myself during the journey down to the southern port. So I bought the early evening papers, put on a travelling cap, lighted my pipe, and settled down comfortably in a corner awaiting the departure of the train. As I was surveying the busy scene on the platform—the passengers distractedly hurrying to and fro, and the porters dodging them with their heavily-laden trucks—my eye caught the contents bill of the *Globe* hanging outside the bookstall. On it was a bold line—

“ROBBERY AT A WEST-END BANK THIS  
MORNING.”

With but slight curiosity I opened the paper

which I had just purchased, and, under the same heading, read the following :—

“Shortly after one o'clock this morning, at Messrs. Batten, Chirrol & Co.'s branch establishment in Piccadilly, a well-dressed man presented himself before the paying-out counter and requested cash for an open cheque for £5000, drawn to the order of John Henry Jones by one of the bank's customers, Mr. George Rumbelow. In reply to the usual question, 'How will you have it?' the man in question, a total stranger, elected to receive £4500 in five-pound notes, and the balance in gold, stating that the money required was for the use of clients going abroad for the holidays. Mr. Rumbelow being a well-known excursion agent, of course the notes and the coin were handed over to the stranger, who signed his name on the back of the cheque as 'John Henry Jones,' and departed with the proceeds in a stout leathern bag. He is described as of medium height, with full black beard, and wearing glasses. He spoke with a slight American accent. Nothing more was thought of the matter till half an hour later, when Mr. Rumbelow himself arrived at the bank in a state of great consternation, accompanied by a gentleman equally excited. It appears that the latter, the real Mr. John Arthur Jones, is acting-manager of the Anglo-American Opera Company which has just returned to this country from the United States. Arrangements had been made to settle all arrears due to members of the company to-day, and, with this object, Mr. Jones obtained a cheque for £5000 yesterday afternoon from Mr. Rumbelow, his English agent. This morning he missed his pocket-book containing the draft, and at once went to Mr. Rumbelow's office.

Mr. Jones, who is staying at the Hotel Victoria, can in no way account for his loss. The police are making active researches, but no trace of the swindler has as yet been discovered."

I tossed the paper from me with a contemptuous smile. It seemed to me that Mr. Jones had acted with culpable carelessness, and I pictured to myself Mr. Jenkin Barbican in the position of the directors of the Opera Company. I would not have been in Mr. Jones's shoes for a trifle. Just then the officials were shouting "stand back," the last carriage door had slammed, the engine-whistle was blowing, when a man in a light overcoat tried to enter my compartment. Finding the door locked, he quickly made use of a railway key, and, as the train began to move, literally flung himself on to the floor of the carriage. "Smart work that," he panted as, somewhat resentfully, I made good the fastening. "By Jove! I thought I'd missed it."

The speaker was a clean-shaven, fair man of perhaps thirty, of medium height, attired in a heather-coloured shooting suit. He had a bag in his right hand and a rug over his left arm.

As he seated himself opposite to me, he went on, "'I hope I don't intrude,' as Paul

Pry says, but I wouldn't have missed this train for a good deal."

I assured him, with my best stand-off air, that he had put me to no inconvenience. Then, pulling the little printed book of "The Two Roses" from my pocket, I began running through my lines, for I determined by every means in my power to prevent that coxcomb Adolphus Whittaker from playing Caleb Deecie, and as yet I was not quite letter perfect. I set to work resolutely, but after some time my studies were interrupted by the voice of my companion.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but are you a member of the theatrical profession?"

"Well, not exactly," I replied, feeling rather proud at being mistaken for what I was not. A great many persons have the same vanity.

"I beg your pardon again," said my fellow-traveller, "but, seeing you with that book in your hand and noticing your histrionic cast of countenance, I thought perhaps you did. I am most interested in the theatre myself," he added.

"Perhaps," thought I to myself, "this may be a leading histrion or a manager. He certainly has a stagey appearance."

So, banishing my previous annoyance, I told him in what way I was connected with the boards. He listened with great interest, and led me to tell him more of my experiences as an amateur than I had ever revealed before in the course of conversation.

"I see plainly," he said gravely, "that you ought to go on the regular stage. There's a great opening just now for good-looking, gentlemanlike actors. Just look at the handsome salaries they command. Why, a man who otherwise might be plodding away in an office on a miserable pittance, makes his thousands, and enjoys the most agreeable society in the world. I am not saying so from hearsay. I know it by experience."

I was now quite persuaded that he was either an artistic or a managerial potentate, and I could not help being flattered at the extremely nice way in which he alluded to my appearance. I felt inclined to return the compliment, for he was certainly prepossessing and well-favoured, the only drawback to his expression being a peculiar twitch now and again of his left eyelid.

"Then I suppose," I said, "that you are well acquainted with the boards?"

“Well acquainted!” he echoed. “Ye gods! who better? Irving, Toole, Wyndham, Vezin, Ellen Terry, the Bancrofts, Wilson Barrett, Hare, down to Arthur Roberts. I know every one of them intimately!”

Then he rattled off for my edification such a string of anecdotes about these celebrities of the boards that the train was pulling up at Basingstoke before I realised how far I had gone on my journey. I let down the window to ask a porter how long the wait at the station would be, and, as I rose from the seat, my confounded bag followed suit, and hung from my left side by the chain like a cavalry sabre.

My companion laughed, and observed, “Your faithful companion won’t leave you. Well, a man of deeds,” he said, referring to the inscription, “can’t be too careful.”

I sat down somewhat nettled as the train moved on. “A business man,” I remarked in my most sententious style, “must always be on his guard against accidents.”

“A business man!” he cried. “Well, upon my word, I should never have taken you, with your keen love of Thespis, for a disciple of Themis. I trust that no unfortunate breaker of his country’s laws



awaits your arrival at Southampton in fear and trembling."

"I am not going to Southampton," I answered curtly, "but to Cowes, where my business is with the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen." My pride was touched by his tone, and I desired to give him some idea of my importance.

He gave a long whistle and chuckled with infinite merriment, and then said—

"Well, this is an extraordinary coincidence. I am going to Cowes, and *my* business is also with the Grand Duke."

"Indeed?" I cried. "That is indeed curious."

"But not so curious as the object of my visit," he went on. "Come, I will be frank with you. I daresay that you have been wondering what was my connection with the theatre. Briefly, my name is Martin Baker, and I am by profession a perruquier."

"A perruquier!" I repeated, rather disappointed to find that my ideas with regard to actor or manager were thus rudely dissipated.

"Neither more nor less," he continued, "but don't please imagine that I am one of your ordinary wig-makers. No, sir; I am an

inventor, and, I may say, a successful one. I will give you a proof of my assertion, Mr.—I have not the honour of knowing your name.”

“Harry Holdsworth,” I put in.

“Mr. Holdsworth, I know you by reputation as one of our best amateurs, and I will explain to you the reason of my journey to Cowes. You may, or may not, be aware that the Grand Duke, in honour of his approaching nuptials, is about to give at Solent Castle a series of dramatic representations illustrative of Teutonic mythology. I am entrusted with the entire dressing of this superb spectacle. Costumes, wigs, and accessories are all in my department. Now, I daresay that you, with your practical experience of the boards, have constantly noticed how ill-fitting and unrealistic are the hirsute ornaments of the performers. Nay, more, they are in constant danger of coming off, to the great detriment of some thrilling situation. Is that not so?”

“Yes,” I replied. “I remember my own moustache falling off at a most critical moment. It was most distressing.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Baker sympathetically, as he unfastened his hand bag and took from

it something wrapped in tissue paper. "Now, I beg of you not to look at me for a minute. If you don't mind, cover your face with that newspaper. I want you to have the full effect of my invention."

I hid my countenance as he desired. Almost immediately Mr. Baker said, "Now, look." I did so, and in place of the smooth-cheeked, fair man of just now, I beheld a dark-complexioned individual, with raven locks, and a carefully pointed beard of the same hue. I was astonished at the change. He looked like a different being, though his eyelid twitched more than ever.

"Wonderful!" I muttered. "Wonderful!"

"I thought you'd say so," said Mr. Baker. "Now, I beg you to observe that I stand no chance of losing my wig and beard. See, I pull them. They are not to be moved, and yet, heigh, presto!" (he put his hand just under his right ear) "and here we are again!" He was himself again, with the exception of some tawny powder, which he brushed off his nose and cheeks with a silk handkerchief.

"Now, observe," said my companion with great animation, "the whole of this hairy disguise is fixed on a wire framework made of aluminium—the lightest of metals. Feel it. The weight is nothing; yet it is held

together in the strongest fashion. Just under the ear is a tiny lock—self-fastening—which prevents the apparatus from slipping. Here's the key. What do you think of my invention?"

"It is the most ingenious thing I have ever seen," I answered; "but, although you may be able to work it so easily, others might not."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Baker rather indignantly. "In my representations at Cowes, I shall have over fifty knights to equip, every one provided with my 'Capillas-ticon' (for so I call my invention), and I will guarantee that not one of them bungles in putting it on or taking it off. Here, try for yourself."

And he handed me the wig-beard. I slipped it on easily enough, and the spring closed without a sound.

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Baker. "It suits you admirably. Have a look at yourself in this glass."

He gave me a hand mirror. I beheld a Spanish cavalier, not homely Harry Holdsworth.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Baker. "But stay, your skin is too white. You want a fervid colour with that black fur. Allow me." He

dipped his handkerchief into a small box filled with brown powder. "Let me begin with the nose."

He did. I remember no more of what occurred in the train.

When I recovered my senses I was lying on a horsehair-covered couch in a plainly furnished room. My head was splitting with headache, and I could not recover my senses for two or three minutes after I had opened my eyes. At last I sat up and exclaimed, "Where am I?"

"Oh! you've come to at last," observed a man in a blue uniform, who was sitting at the table reading a newspaper. "You've had a goodish nap. Now, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Say for myself!" I answered peevishly. "I wish you'd tell me where I am?"

"In very good hands," he said, pressing a knob on the wall.

Suddenly I recollected the emeralds. I feverishly pressed my hand to my side. There was no chain.

"Where's my bag?" I shouted, springing up. "You've stolen my bag, you scoundrel."

"Pshaw!" he said. "Take it easy; your bag's all right."

As he spoke, two men dressed in plain clothes entered the room. One of them approached me, and laying his hand on my shoulder, said, "Robert Venables, *alias* Sir Harry Askwith, *alias* Baron de Volberg, I arrest you for forgery and robbery at Messrs. Batten & Chirrol's bank. Here's my warrant."

"What!" I screamed. "What! Are you mad, or am I? Where's my bag?"

"Here," said the detective, for such he was, producing Mr. Baker's valise. "But don't you touch it, as it will be used in evidence against you, together with anything you may say to the purpose."

I was simply thunderstruck, and sank back on the sofa. My hands wandered feebly over my face, which felt very strange, when I suddenly recollected the "Capillasticon."

"And this cursed thing," I shouted, leaping to my feet and clutching at the beard. "Take it off at once—take it off. But," I added despairingly, "perhaps you haven't got the key?"

"But you may," said the man, with a smile. "Here, run the rule over him."

Then they emptied my pockets and searched my boots, socks, and shirt. I was too dazed to resist,

"Where does it unfasten?" asked my captor.

I pointed to the catch.

"There's no key here to fit it," observed the detective. "The wig's on metal, I suppose?" he added, after submitting my head to a phrenological examination.

I nodded in a vacuous way.

"File it off," he said to one of the other men. In less than half a minute I was denuded of the "Capillasticon," and my smooth cheeks became revealed.

"A clever dodge," remarked the detective admiringly. "Might humbug anybody but me. Even your sham sleep wasn't good enough for that. But I'll give you the credit of being a born actor. Now, do you want anything to eat or drink before we start?"

"Why, what are you going to do?" I asked tremulously.

"Take you up to London by the mail train," he answered with a wink.

"But," I said, the full weight of my horrible position weighing down on my brain, "there's some awful mistake. I have lost property worth ——"

"Stow that," interrupted the detective. "For your own sake, you'd better reserve

any defence you may have till you appear at Great Marlborough Street."

At Great Marlborough Street! I must indeed be mad. Was I really Harry Holdsworth, who had left London on a mission to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen? If so, where was my bag containing the precious jewels entrusted to me by Mr. Barbican? I must find them at all cost. I made a run for the door.

"Don't try that on!" observed the detective, hurling me back on to the couch. "If you'll go quietly, I shan't put the bracelets on before we're in the train."

"Brandy!" I muttered hoarsely. "Brandy!"

"Here," said the detective, handing one of his subordinates a sovereign from my money, "get the poor devil what he wants. It had better be a bottle. I could do with a drop myself."

The spirit seemed to revive me. I thought, "What has become of the villain Baker?" Then aloud, I said, "I want to ask one question. Was there any one else in the carriage with me?"

"A gentleman got out," replied the detective, "from the compartment in which



we found you. He gave us his card. Here it is."

I read—

"MR. HARRY HOLDSWORTH,  
*Representing*  
MESSRS. BARBICAN & CO.,  
*Court Jewellers,*  
294 OLD BOND STREET."

It was my own card. Truly, the fates were fighting hard against me. After that I relapsed into moody silence. I never uttered another word, not even when the detective—I gathered that his name was Goblet—put the handcuffs on my wrists preparatory to starting, not through all that long and weary journey to Waterloo, not even when they locked me up in a cell at the police station. But, when the door closed, I sank down on the floor with a sob, and burst into a flood of tears. The outburst did me good, and, weary in body and mind, I soon afterwards sank into a heavy sleep.

## CHAPTER III.

### *AT THE POLICE COURT.*

THE next day being Sunday, I had full time for reflection on my miserable condition. It would be useless for me to record the thousand and one ideas which passed through my mind. I was only roused to a sense of stern reality by the inspector of police—a most considerate and kind-hearted official—asking me if I would care to consult a solicitor. I said that I knew of no lawyer to employ, for I was not going to reveal my pitiable state to Mr. Barbican's legal adviser, Mr. Durithorpe. The inspector then suggested that I should call in Mr. Robert Bernard, a solicitor, who lived hard by, and had the ear of the sitting magistrates. "He's not generally at home during holiday time, but I heard him tell the clerk of the Court that he expected an important cablegram this morning from New York." So I sent off a

note to Mr. Bernard, praying for his immediate attendance. What the inspector said proved to be right. Mr. Bernard would be round in half an hour. I was agreeably surprised at his appearance. Instead of a musty personage in sober black, I beheld a good-looking, well-dressed, dark man of some thirty years, the white flower in whose button-hole was as immaculate as his shining linen. A pleasant odour of *eau-de-Cologne* was distributed by his presence, when he entered the cell. He soon put me at my ease, and I told him my strange and unhappy adventure exactly as it happened, he occasionally interrupting me to strengthen certain statements, of which he took copious notes.

"I think you're all right," he said, as he put his silver-bound memorandum book in his pocket. "I had intended going up the river to-morrow, but I shall now devote my time to your most interesting case. The *alibi* is as certain as the noonday sun, provided that I can get all the witnesses into Court on Tuesday morning."

"What witnesses?" I asked.

"Leave that to me," he answered with a pleasant smile. "Meanwhile, cheer up. I'll send you in some books and newspapers.

The new piece at the Gaiety seems to be a great 'go.' It's a pity you can't smoke here. But, no matter, have a good dinner. I'll arrange that."

"But what about Mr. Barbican's emeralds," I inquired anxiously, as we shook hands.

"Now, my dear sir," he replied with that *debonnaire* smile of his. "You'll excuse me for using bad language on Sunday, but, until you're safe, d——n Mr. Barbican's emeralds!"

With these words he left me to myself. I am not going to weary any one with a description of my frame of mind during my imprisonment. I know that I was chiefly concerned about three things—first, what had become of my bag; secondly, whether Hetty knew of my parlous plight; thirdly, whether Adolphus Whittaker would after all play Caleb Deecie? Mr. Bernard gave me a breezy call on Monday evening. He would tell me no particulars, but observed with a self-satisfied chuckle, "I've never handled a better bit of business. I've been working like a nigger, but to-morrow evening we will, if you please, dine together at the Café Royal. No, I'm not laughing at you. I mean what I say. Come, I'll bet you the

dinner, and what's more, I'll make you a present. Melton's sure to win the Derby. Be on him in time, and you won't be out of pocket for my costs." So saying, he waved his hand airily and disappeared. I never came across so cheery a lawyer, and I became almost sanguine under his influence. But one suggestion which he made I would not fall in with, and that was to communicate with my friends. "Well, well," he had said, "perhaps they will communicate with you."

It was with infinite trepidation that I took my stand in the dock on the morrow. I scarcely listened to the tedious evidence given by Mr. Goblet and his associate. I only roused myself when Mr. Benjamin Couter, paying-out clerk at Batten & Chirrol's, went into the box to swear to my identity. He said that I was, to the best of his belief, the man to whom he had handed the money, but that he was dark, with a full beard. He paid over £5000 in notes and cash at half-past twelve on Saturday last. Mr Goblet produced the hateful "Capillasticon," and the prosecuting counsel insisted that I should put it on. Mr. Bernard vehemently protested, but the magistrate overruled the objection.

"This is a case, Mr. Bernard," he said severely, "in which the police have acted, as usual, with distinguished energy. I cannot have their efforts baulked at a crucial moment." Mr. Bernard smiled, and, with a graceful wave, bade me don the atrocious disguise. Then Mr. Couter swore to my being the man who had presented the cheque, but allowed, on cross-examination, that I did not possess a peculiar twitch of the left eyelid which he had noticed in the thief. Then another clerk swore positively that I was the man, and so did a cabman, who averred that he had driven me to the bank.

This was, for the time being, the case for the prosecution. The prosecuting counsel asked for a remand, without bail—a request which the magistrate was about to grant immediately, when up jumped Mr. Bernard, and, having settled the gardenia in his coat, announced that he had a full and convincing answer to the charge. As the newspaper reports said, there was sensation in the Court. Nothing abashed, Mr. Bernard requested that I might be permitted to remove the "Capillasticon." On the bench giving assent, he requested that Miss Hetty Cameron might be called. I shook in

every limb as my dear sweetheart took the Testament in her hand.

Mr. Bernard asked, "Do you know the gentleman in the dock, Miss Cameron?"

"Perfectly. He is Mr. Harry Holdsworth—a very great friend of mine—employed by my uncle, Mr. Jenkin Barbican." She said this with the greatest coolness imaginable.

"Would you mind telling me," continued Mr. Bernard, pausing for the reporters to take down his sentences verbatim, "when you saw Mr. Holdsworth last?"

"I saw him on Saturday. We met by appointment outside of Peter Robinson's establishment at half-past twelve, and afterwards lunched at Verrey's restaurant, where we remained till nearly half-past three. Then Mr. Holdsworth dropped me at St. James's Hall, and went on in a hansom to Waterloo station; at least, that is where he told the cabman to drive to."

"Thank you, Miss Cameron," said Mr. Bernard suavely, and sat down.

Up jumped the prosecuting counsel, a little nervous fellow, with a voice like a rasp.

"You say that you met Mr. Holdsworth at half-past twelve, Miss Cameron?" he began. "How are you so certain of the time?"

"Because," answered Hetty demurely, "I was a quarter of an hour late, and looked at my watch."

The people in Court laughed at this repartee, but I also heard a voice say "Dreadful" behind me. I thought I recognised the accents of Mr. Barbican. The prosecuting counsel did his best to shake Hetty's evidence, and even dared to ask—

"How is it that you, a young lady of respectable family, came to make an assignation with the prisoner?"

"Because we are engaged to be married," answered Hetty simply, and again there was loud laughter.

My love left the box amid applause, which lasted so long that it awoke an official in a gown, who called out "Silence" after Hetty had vanished, but not before throwing a loving glance at me.

Then Mr. Bernard began dealing out his witnesses like a conjurer with trumps. He produced Mr. Barbican, who wanted to dilate on his own misfortune; two waiters from Verrey's, the cloak-room porter at Waterloo, the guard of the Southampton train, and also the cabman, who had taken me to the station. Even the magistrate was convinced, and said he wished to hear no more evidence.



The *alibi* was complete. But before discharging me he wished to know how it was that I came to be found—so he was pleased to put it—“disguised in so disreputable a fashion as to deceive some of the shrewdest guardians of the law?”

Mr. Bernard rose to the situation. He exclaimed, “Your worship will, I am sure, not press that question, in the interest of the members of that intelligent force to whom you have paid so well-deserved a tribute.”

The magistrate bowed his acquiescence, but observed, “I shall make a note of this case.”

“I trust, sir, that you will,” responded Mr. Bernard gaily, “for I am sure that you have not heard the last of it.”

I was again a free man, and hurried out of Court to pour out all my thankfulness to the brave and true girl who had stood by me in such loyal fashion; but she and Mr. Barbican had, I learnt, just driven away in his brougham, the young lady, as one of the bystanders told me, “sobbin’ dreffful.” It did not need Mr. Bernard to tell me that I must without delay find my employer.

“I expect,” said my advocate genially, “that you’ll find old B. with a good deal of his hair off. Nevertheless, I shouldn’t take the ‘Capillasticon’ with you.”

There are men heartless enough to crack jokes at a funeral. Still, after the noble way in which Mr. Bernard had worked, I could not reprove his levity; but it was with very despondent feelings that I started for Bond Street. On arrival at the shop, I let myself in at the private entrance, for I could not face the young men behind the counter. Timidly I knocked at Mr. Barbican's door.

"Come in," growled a surly voice.

I entered, and was confronted by the great man. His face was lividly white, and his eyes positively glared over, not through, his spectacles.

"Well," he said, "you've come at last?"

"I couldn't ——" I began, but he interrupted me fiercely.

"No excuses, sir; no d——d protestations of innocence. Where are my emeralds?"

"You know that they have been stolen," I retorted.

"Stolen! Yes," he snarled, "but by whom?"

"Good God, sir," I cried indignantly, "you don't dare to suspect me?"

"You were the person to whom I entrusted the jewels," he said bitterly. "You are responsible for them."

“But you know that I was robbed that  
\_\_\_\_\_”

“You need not repeat the incredible story which I have heard from your solicitor. You are either a culpable accomplice or a drivelling idiot,” he went on with yet more anger in his tone, “and if I did my duty I should give you in charge this very minute.”

“Stop!” I cried hotly. “I am as innocent as you are, and I won’t stand your insults.”

“I hope that you are” he said in a more subdued tone. He whistled down the tube communicating with the shop, and added, “Send up the gentleman from Scotland Yard.”

“From Scotland Yard!” I shouted.

“You needn’t be afraid,” said Mr. Barbican. “He hasn’t got any instructions to molest you at present.”

A rap at the door, and a little pousy man, in a yachting suit, entered the room. He had a red face, and might have been between fifty and sixty. His hairless countenance was like a wrinkled apple, and his little dark eyes were almost hidden by his thick eyebrows.

“Ah! Mr. Bodkin,” said my employer.

"Here is Mr. Harry Holdsworth, the unfortunate victim of the jewel robbery."

"Delighted to meet you, sir," said Mr. Bodkin, with a jerk of the head as he proceeded, I could see, to take a mental inventory of my features. "I shall rely greatly on your assistance."

"Now, go," said Mr. Barbican, with a wave of his hand to me. "Mr. Bodkin knows what to do."

Mr. Bodkin jerked his head again.

"One moment, Mr. Barbican," I broke forth desperately, "I must have a word with you in private."

Mr. Bodkin looked inquiringly at Mr. Barbican.

"In private," I repeated. "Ask Mr. Bodkin to retire."

"Has your communication anything to do with the case?" asked Mr. Barbican hesitatingly.

"Nothing whatever," I replied, "but it deeply concerns my happiness, and I will not stir a step till you have heard me."

"Leave us, Mr. Bodkin," said the jeweller. When we were alone, he ejaculated impatiently, "Now, what is it?"

"About Hetty," I began, but he broke in indignantly—

“Never mention my niece’s name again in that familiar way. She has done with you for ever.”

“It’s false!” I said angrily. “You don’t mean what you say?”

“Read that,” he answered contemptuously, throwing me a folded note. Tremblingly I untwisted it, recognised Hetty’s handwriting, and read—

“Good-bye, Harry Holdsworth, good-bye for ever. Hetty Cameron.”

“This is your doing,” I cried distractedly. “But I will not be satisfied until Hetty has told me to go with her own lips.”

“That will be difficult,” remarked Mr. Barbican. “She has left London, I expect, never to return.”

“Never to return!” I echoed blankly, “never to return! Am I never to see her again? Oh! Mr. Barbican, if you have a spark of pity in your heart, tell me where I can find her, if only to bid her farewell. Remember that she is my affianced wife. Remember that!”

“I remember nothing,” he broke in, “except your criminal carelessness. All is at end between Miss Cameron and yourself. Go!”

“But, sir,” I pleaded, “you are unjust—

you condemn me without trial—you give me no prospect of clearing myself—no chance of making amends—no——”

“Stop!” he broke in. “I will give you a chance. When you give me £17,000 or return the Zarinthia emeralds I will absolve you freely and fully. That, I promise you.”

He said this with a sneer in every word, and pointed to the door. I found Mr. Bodkin on the landing outside, pretending to be asleep on a chair. The well-feigned start which he gave, when I shook him, convinced me that he had not forgotten the traditional use of the keyhole.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *BODKIN AND THE GRAND DUKE.*

I HAD no relatives to whom to turn for consolation and advice. I was as absolutely lonely as Alexander Selkirk on the island of Juan Fernandez, unless, indeed, the companionship of Mr. Bodkin could be taken into account. But I did not regard him as a human being in the early days of my distress. He seemed to me to be a kind of animate walking-stick or umbrella, bound to go wherever I bent my steps, and putting himself in a convenient corner, whenever I came to a halt. I know now that I wronged Mr. Bodkin in supposing him to be devoid of sympathy, and that his secretiveness was the cause of his apparently callous character. Together we made many journeys, always seeking for a clue whereby to discover the mysterious Martin Baker's movements, always without success. My own endeavours to find some trace of Hetty were equally fruitless. I wrote, I

advertised, and I made numerous visits to Buckley Lodge, Clapham. My letters were returned unanswered; my advertisements were not responded to; and at Buckley Lodge I received the invariable reply, "Miss Cameron has gone away for good." Nor were my efforts to see Mr. Barbican of better avail. He not only declined to receive me, but he forwarded me a cheque for three months' salary in a sheet of note-paper, inscribed, "Over and above H. H.'s deserts." And yet he did not scruple to employ my time in running about with Bodkin, who, however, I am bound to say, paid all the expenses of our trips. He was jointly engaged by Mr. Barbican and Messrs. Batten & Chirrol, the bankers, with whom I had an interview. Their aggrieved manner plainly showed that they considered me greatly to blame for not having arrested my travelling companion on suspicion, for they were certain Mr. Martin Baker was the individual, who had presented the cheque at the bank. As to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen, I never gave him a thought till my eye happened to light on a paragraph in the *Times*, in which it was stated that the proposed union between His Royal Highness and Princess Mathilda of Trans-Caucasia had



been suddenly broken off "for reasons of State." I threw the paper down angrily, and cursed the day when I first heard of the Grand Duke's proposed alliance, and remembered with bitter regret how I had clasped those hateful emeralds round my Hetty's neck. I probably should have forgotten the incident but for a visit which I received on the very next morning. I was having breakfast in my chambers, and gloomily expecting the arrival of the inimitable Bodkin, when the bell rang. "He's there!" I said sulkily, and I let the summons be repeated impatiently half a dozen times before I opened the door. But the man who stood before me was not the detective. He was a total stranger and apparently a foreigner, with an olive complexion, frizzy hair, and a black moustache turned up at the ends. His age might have been rather over thirty.

"Confound it," he began angrily in English, with an unmistakable accent, "how dare you! Ah! but I mistake—you are Mr. Holdsworth himself. I do not mistake, I trust."

"No," I answered. "What is it you want?"

"May I take the liberty to intrude?" he

asked with an insinuating smile, which revealed two long rows of very white and very pointed teeth.

"Come in," I said indifferently. The stranger entered my sitting-room with the deference of a Hindoo crossing the threshold of a British officer's bungalow. With hat in hand, he stood submissively, until I pointed to a chair and begged him to be seated.

"Now," I added, "what can I do for you?"

"In the first place," he said with the same measured diction, in the same silky tones, "two questions — Are you indeed Mr. Harry Holdsworth of Messrs. Barbican & Co., jewellers, and do you allow me to smoke?"

"Yes, to both," I answered, wondering what he was aiming at, as his fingers deftly twisted into shape a cigarette, which he lighted from a cedar match taken from a gold fusee-box.

"Ah! now we are all right," he exclaimed, as he dispelled the blue vapour from his nostrils. "Mr. Holdsworth," he continued, "it is well, is it not, that I should make myself known?"

I nodded my head, but almost in the same breath he went on—

"I am Count von Schlittenhagen."

"What!" I cried, "Marshal of the Household to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen?"

"None other," he replied with a seductive smile. "Here is my card. You are surprised, Mr. Holdsworth, but you are satisfied?"

Again I nodded, and again he proceeded.

"I have come to see you on a matter of some delicacy. It refers to the celebrated Zarinthia emeralds."

"Confound the Zarinthia emeralds," I burst forth at the mention of those ill-fated gems.

My visitor was not abashed by my ill-breeding. With the same smile he observed, "With all my heart. Let us condemn them together. Do you wish for strong oath-words? I have them in all languages."

"No, no," I said, "I beg your pardon for being so hasty, but if you only knew what trouble they have brought me, you would understand my irritation."

"But, my dear Mr. Holdsworth, I *do* know," he replied gently. "That is why I am here. Allow me to explain myself. You are well aware that my august master was anxious to purchase the Zarinthia jewels, in order to present them to his bride-elect.

But what you do not know is that his inability to fulfil his promise has been the cause of this most desirable alliance being broken off. The Princess Mathilda, an amiable and beautiful lady, nevertheless possesses a capricious temper. She is easily upset. Accustomed to have every desire satisfied, she cannot believe that the Grand Duke was unable to buy the gems, discredits the story of the robbery, and refuses to carry out the matrimonial contract unless the emeralds are handed over to her. Briefly she ascribes—heaven know how unjustly—the disappearance of the jewels to parsimony on the part of His Royal Highness. Now, what sum did your firm require for them?"

"Seventeen thousand pounds," I answered, wondering what his narrative meant.

"Ah!" he said, and then, after a pause, he added with a persuasive smile, "well, Mr. Holdsworth, to show you how little the question of money was at stake, I offer you twenty-five thousand pounds for them."

"Twenty-five thousand pounds!" I echoed.

"Exactly, and *no questions asked*," he said with emphasis.

"What do you mean?" I cried indignantly.

"What I say," he answered calmly.

"Come, my dear sir, I am a man of the

world, accustomed to deal with all sorts of men, from professors of *la haute politique* down to dealers in—what shall I say?—missing property.”

“What!” I shouted furiously, “do you believe that I know where that accursed necklace is hidden? Do you dare to suspect that I connived at the robbery? Answer me,” I said threateningly, and raising my hand, “or——”

“Gently, gently Mr. Holdsworth,” he broke in suavely, “perhaps I was mistaken, perhaps I have come on a fool’s errand. Come, sir,” he continued resolutely, “will you pledge me your word that you had no hand in the theft of the emeralds?”

“As God is my Maker I had not,” I cried. “You see before you an unfortunate individual, ruined not only in his profession, but also in the dearest hopes of his life, through these miserable stones, and yet you suspect me of being the author of my own wretched plight. Why, the sum I originally mentioned would restore me to position, to honour, and, above all, to happiness. Go, Count von Schlittenhagen, and beg your master not to make an innocent man feel the weight of his condition more bitterly than he does.” The Count

rose to his feet, and took up his hat and cane.

"Mr. Holdsworth," he said, with a courteous bow, "accept my hand and my sincere apologies for my suspicions. I regret having said a word calculated to give you pain. My only excuse is that the Zarinthia gems have been stolen so often before."

"Stolen before," I said, relinquishing his grasp. "When, and where?"

"That I cannot tell you just now," he replied. "But ask Mr. Barbican from whom he obtained them. Good morning, Mr. Holdsworth. Once more a thousand apologies."

Before I had recovered from my surprise he had disappeared, leaving me in a state of unparalleled amazement. I was absolutely astounded at the visit and at the Count's statement that the emeralds had been stolen, not once, but many times, before my unlucky adventure.

Did Mr. Barbican know this? Apparently he did, or why should the Marshal of the Grand Ducal Court bid me make that inquiry, "from whom he obtained them?" While I was puzzling my brain over these questions, Mr. Bodkin entered by the door,

which, in my excitement, I had forgotten to close.

“Have you heard the news?” he asked in his jerky way.

“What news?” I replied. “Have the emeralds been found?”

“No, no; but there was a curious coincidence last night, or rather early this morning. Mr. Barbican’s shop was broken into, and also his house at Clapham.”

“Good heavens! Did the burglars get much plunder?”

Mr. Bodkin gave a queer smile as he said, “No; that’s the curious part of the matter. Although both the safes were most dexterously cracked, not a single valuable article was missing, when the outrages were discovered—the Clapham one first. There a paper, which I should call of little account, had been taken.”

“And to what did it refer?” I asked.

“It was only the receipt for the money which Mr. Barbican paid for the Zarinthia emeralds,” said Mr. Bodkin, with a shrug of his shoulders.

“The receipt!” I exclaimed, thinking of what the Count had said; “by whom was it signed?”

Mr. Bodkin drew a note-book from his

breast pocket, and methodically turned over the leaves and observed—

“Ah! here it is. According to Mr. Barbican’s books, the receipt was signed by Paul Délaz. Mr. B. is pretty sure that he was a Frenchman. But why do you ask?”

“There’s a mystery somewhere,” I replied. “Sit down and I’ll tell you something which may help you to find the clue to it.” Then I related to him the remarkable visit which I had just received. Mr. Bodkin said nothing, but made copious notes as I spoke.

“Well, what do you think of it?” I asked eagerly, when I had finished my story.

“It seems to me,” answered Mr. Bodkin slowly, “that the gentleman who called on you must have had something to do with the burglaries at Clapham and in Bond Street.”

“What nonsense,” I said. “How could Count von Schlittenhagen be mixed up in such a business?”

“And how do you know,” retorted Mr. Bodkin, “that the party who came here was Count von Schlittenhagen? Are you acquainted with the Count’s features? Oh! his card, that’s nothing. I knew of a man once who made a tour of the English watering-places as Napoleon the Third, and



a very expensive customer they found him, I can tell you. When he was lagged, he turned out to be an escaped convict from New Caledonia. This Count of yours appears to me to be one of the same kidney, and is most likely wanted at the present moment."

"Then what was his motive in coming to me?" I asked with a satirical laugh.

Mr. Bodkin took a pinch of snuff from a capacious Scotch horn, ornamented with a resplendent cairngorm, before he replied.

"Don't be offended, Mr. Holdsworth," he said, "but didn't he mistake you for a thief? Didn't he offer to come to terms with you?"

I was silent. My own evidence was strongly in favour of Mr. Bodkin's theory.

"I perceive you take my point," Mr. Bodkin went on. "But what dishes me is why your Count—supposing him to be the criminal I take him to be—should have volunteered—mind you, I say volunteered—to give you the information that the Zarinthia emeralds had often been stolen before. This was a plain statement of fact, into which I must inquire. Meantime, I must go to the Yard, and would be obliged if you'd accompany me and tell your own

tale about the Count. It's a fine morning, and we can walk if you please. There's nothing like exercise for the development of the brain, and take it from me, sir, that no country ramble comes up to a stretch through the streets of London. You get over miles without thinking of it."

In ten minutes I was ready, and we sallied forth together—Mr. Bodkin being very particular about walking on the sunny side of the thoroughfare. Just as we neared the Palace Theatre, Mr. Bodkin observed with a twinkle in his eye, "Mr. Holdsworth, at this time in the morning I make it a rule to supply the inner man with a refresher. He needs it, and I find him more ready for business afterwards. That refresher takes the form of lager beer—light, and yet exhilarating. If you'll allow me, I'll show you a nook where we can get the real article."

"By all means," I responded. "Lead on."

Mr. Bodkin turned sharply to the right, dived into Soho and, in some fifty paces, halted before a dirty-looking restaurant.

"Never mind appearances," said Mr. Bodkin. "I guarantee the real article."

We went in and found ourselves in a regular German *brasserei*, with little tables, sanded floor, and a mingled odour of stale tobacco, onions, and *sauer-kraut*. Not another customer was to be seen. Mr. Bodkin, who seemed familiar with the place, thumped with his stick on the zinc-covered counter, and a fat and fair Teutonic lady, in a shabby velvet bodice, waddled to the receipt of custom from some lair in the background. She nodded and grinned at Mr. Bodkin with such hearty delight that I burst into a roar of laughter. My companion, in no wise disconcerted, addressed the lady with these words—

“Zwei, mein Schatz, zwei.”

“Dünnel?” asked the corpulent Hebe.

“Ja, wohl,” replied Mr. Bodkin.

We sat down at one of the tables, and were presently dipping our noses into the great flipped *ziedels* with considerable satisfaction.

“Good?” asked Mr. Bodkin, after a long pull.

“First-rate,” I answered, wiping the froth from my moustache. As I did so, my eyes lighted on a copy of a German illustrated paper called *Ueber Land und Meer*, which was lying on the bench beside me. A

portrait on the front page seemed strangely familiar to me. I took up the journal, and there, sure enough, in black and white, were depicted the features of my extraordinary visitor, Count von Schlittenhagen, but the inscription underneath did not refer to that courteous official. It ran as follows:—"His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen, betrothed to Her Serene Highness Princess Mathilda Louisa Maria Olga of Trans-Caucasia." I fairly gasped for breath, and yet I felt a kind of triumph at the explosion of Mr Bodkin's theory.

"Here!" I said, pointing to the portrait. "That's the man who called on me. If you don't read German, I'll translate the letterpress. Now, what about your escaped convict, Mr. Bodkin?"

But all Mr. Bodkin could utter was—"Well, I'm jiggered!"

## CHAPTER V.

### *TO BELGIUM.*

MR. BODKIN'S very vulgar exclamation nevertheless perfectly expressed the feelings of us both. The detective allowed that my identification of my visitor completely baffled his understanding with regard to men and manners.

“Why should a great swell like the Grand Duke go prowling around after the emeralds?” he asked meditatively. “And why, when he did so, should he say that he was his own Marshal of the Court, whatever that may be? Depend upon it, Mr. Holdsworth, we haven't got at the rudiments of this mystery. I suppose that next we shall be finding out that His Royal Highness committed the forgery at Batten & Chirrol's. Bosh, isn't it? I tell you I'm fairly in a fog, and that's the truth. You take my word for it, the criminal investigators at the Yard won't be able to find out where the head begins and the tail ends.

However, it's to them that we must make our report, and that quickly. Hansom is the word and, barring accidents, quick's the motion."

Two minutes afterwards we were on our way in a London gondola to Whitehall. On arrival, we were received, after a brief delay, by a gentleman whom I will call Mr. Johnson. He was one of those lights who, hidden under an official bushel, are ever flashing forth unexpectedly on the dark secrets of mankind. Moreover, Mr. Johnson was a thinker, not a talker. Evidently every incident connected with a case was docketed in some mental pigeon-hole; but, as he cursorily observed, his business was to find evidence, not produce it. He listened attentively to our recital, but made no observation until Mr. Bodkin, who acted as spokesman, had finished. Then Mr. Johnson asked, "Well, what do you propose to do?"

"That's where I'm in a blind alley," replied Mr. Bodkin. "May I ask your advice?"

"Go on, my friend, as you have been going," said Mr. Johnson oracularly, "sift the wheat from the chaff."

"It's all chaff to me," sighed poor Bodkin. "I've been east, west, north, south, and no

emeralds answering to those we're looking for have been placed on the market, even on the quiet. That I'll pledge my professional reputation to."

"Of that I am also certain," observed Mr. Johnson. "Meantime, why not go to the fountain-head? Why not discover the man, Paul Délaz, who sold the jewels to Mr. Barbican? My own impression—remember, I say impression—is that he found a means for recovering them, and that Mr. Holdsworth's movements were as well known to him as if they had been advertised in the papers."

"By Christopher! I believe you're right, Mr. Johnson," cried Mr. Bodkin effusively. "I'll get on his track, if I can, at once."

"One moment," said Mr. Johnson; "how does this description of an individual, seen at Spa last August, tally with the one of Paul Délaz, supplied to you by Mr. Barbican?"

He handed a paper to the detective, who, after a brief perusal, exclaimed, "With trifling differences—the very same! And," he added triumphantly, giving the document to me, "that's your Martin Baker, isn't it?"

"There's not the slightest likeness," I answered. "Why, this man is a little fellow,

only five feet six inches in height, whereas my rascal was as tall as I am."

Mr. Bodkin looked crestfallen.

Mr. Johnson remarked, "You may have been mistaken. Appearances are very deceptive, especially in a railway carriage." Then he intimated that his presence was required elsewhere, and, giving us a frigid kind of a bow, told Mr. Bodkin to report further progress as soon as possible.

"What do you think of him?" asked Mr. Bodkin, as soon as we got into the street again.

"Well, he may be right," I answered indifferently, "but I'll swear that this Paul Délaz was not the man who hounded me in the train. You can't whittle your legs about like walking-sticks."

"That's true," said Mr. Bodkin, "but I've known some giants shrink into dwarfs before now."

"Very likely," I retorted, "but you've never seen a dwarf spring into a giant, except on stilts in a pantomime or at a circus. But it seems to me that you neglected to ask Mr. Johnson a very important question."

"And what was that?" inquired Mr. Bodkin anxiously.



“Why, the description of the person whom you suppose to be Paul Délaz was sent to Scotland Yard. If he had been wanted for some larceny on the Continent, he would scarcely have ventured over here, and boldly sold the emeralds to Mr. Barbican.”

“That’s so,” said Mr. Bodkin drily, “but no one said that he was wanted for larceny. Mr. Barbican bought the jewels in January last. Paul Délaz’s description arrived in August. It got here before the gems.”

“How do you know that?” I queried.

“Because the Hospodar of Zarinthia was not expelled from his dominions until late in October, and, when he fled, he undoubtedly took the emeralds with him. Trust me, Mr. Holdsworth, that I’ve made one or two inquiries, whatever you may think.”

“But, still, you don’t know why this description was sent here?” I urged aggressively.

“No, for the moment I don’t,” replied Mr. Bodkin in an injured tone. “But if you don’t mind waiting in the Grand Hotel buffet, I’ll tell you in ten minutes.”

So saying, the little man, evidently considerably put out, left my side and retraced his footsteps.

I felt sorry that I had nettled the worthy

detective, for I had begun to regard him with precisely the same feeling that is bestowed on the constant stick or umbrella to which, as I have already said, I compared him. At the same time I was glad to perceive that I, a humble and unfortunate outsider in this detestable business, had suggested a point which had escaped his notice, and apparently that of the sapient Mr. Johnson. But the web seemed more tangled than ever, and as I smoked a cigarette outside of the portal where the serious Grand Hotel commissionaire did duty in the Strand, a score of surmises were created in my brain, only to be dismissed as quickly as they were formed. I was just lighting a second cigarette, when a four-wheeled cab, with luggage on the roof, going, for a "growler," at a good pace towards Charing Cross, was suddenly brought up by a collision between two omnibuses. The antagonistic language of the rival conductors roused me from my reverie. I looked at the scene with some amusement, but without interest, when my eyes were arrested by the lady, who sat by the open window of the cab nearest to me. It was Hetty—my own Hetty. Evidently she had perceived me before I saw her, for,

raising a forefinger to her lips, she threw a shred of paper on to the ground just as the cabman extricated himself and gave his horse such a cut with the whip that he plunged madly forward with all the zest of a thoroughbred. I rushed into the roadway to pick up the little white scrap, but not before the wheel of a hansom had gone over it, and very nearly over myself as well. Some words were pencilled on it—evidently the folded edge of a newspaper—but, save one, they were quite obliterated. All I could read was “Belgium.” Like a madman I tore towards Charing Cross, objurgating myself for not having taken the number of the four-wheeler. After countless collisions, I managed to get into the station just as a shrill whistle sounded. I sped towards the Continental platform, and nearly knocked over a porter who was coming through the gate with an empty barrow.

“Too late, sir,” said the ticket inspector, barring my progress. “The mail train’s just gone.”

“Which?” I asked, feverishly impatient.  
“Which?”

“The Dover and Ostend, of course,” he replied. “A minute or two sooner and you’d have caught it by a squeak, like that

old gentleman and his daughter. And they wouldn't have got through the barrier only I know the gent."

"Who was he?"

"Why, Mr. Barbican, the great jeweller—him who was robbed some time back, or rather his stupid fool of a traveller. Men of trust is wanted for them positions, just as they are for mine."

With that, he turned on his heel and entered into conversation with the bookstall clerk. I returned slowly to the Grand Hotel, more agitated than ever. The sudden apparition of Hetty made all the blood rush to my head, as I thought of the cruel injustice which had been done to us both. Why had I never heard from her, since she must have been in England? Surely she could have found some means of communication? Why was she being hurried abroad? Fear, doubt, and suspicion chased one another through my brain. I was like one walking in a dream, and was only roused to my senses by the voice of Mr. Bodkin exclaiming, "Whither away, Mr. Holdsworth? Whither away? Do you want to commit suicide under Nelson's Monument?" And his friendly hand pulled me back on to the pavement, just as I was

about to saunter into the seething turmoil of the street, having eyes which would not see, and ears which would not hear. On coming to myself, my first thought was, "Shall I tell Bodkin?" and as quickly the answer followed, "No. He is in the pay of Barbican." So I allowed the detective to speak first. He was triumphantly aggressive.

"What did I tell you?" he began as we stood by the bar counter.

"Nothing," I replied coldly, "but I told *you* something which had apparently escaped your perception."

"Now, don't be nasty," said Mr. Bodkin apologetically; "be haughty, be severe, be distant, but don't be nasty. I quite allow that you did make a suggestion—I will even say a valuable suggestion—which instantly created a surmise in my bosom. I was right in that forecast. Paul Délaz was simply a political."

"A political?" I asked. "What on earth is a political?"

"One who is wanted by a foreign government for conspiracy or rebellion or some other form of high treason. Round about Soho and Leicester Square there are hundreds of politicals hob-nobbing and

playing dominoes every night with the very men who'd arrest them if they had a half a chance to get them across the Straits of Dover. But they're as artful as monkeys."

"Well, what about Paul Délaz?" I broke in impatiently. "Why was he wanted?"

"Because he, or some one very like him, was a confidential agent of the Eastern Revolutionary Society, which is supposed to have overthrown the Hospodar of Zarinthia."

"And yet," I said incredulously, "you told me that the Hospodar carried off his emeralds in safety. How can you reconcile this with your assertion that this Paul Délaz sold the jewels to Mr. Barbican?"

"I can't reconcile anything," observed Mr. Bodkin, after a pinch of his favourite rappee; "I can only go by the book, in the perusal of which you've often to read between the lines. Now, look here, Mr. Holdsworth, I'm a bit of a general in my way, and I hold with rapid advances into the enemy's country, after the fashion of the German commanders. Wellington's slow and sure game is of no use nowadays. We've no time for entrenchments; we've got to get on. It doesn't take me a month of Sundays to consider my position. Like Napoleon, I'm off to Waterloo, come what may."

"To Waterloo?" I cried, amazed at the little man's vehemence.

"Well, to Belgium—it's the same thing," he said with a chuckle. "Are you coming with me?"

I was so astonished by the coincidence of Hetty having gone to Belgium, and Mr. Bodkin's wanting to go, that I could not reply. My companion noted my silence and put it down to hesitation.

"You don't like leaving the country, eh?" he whispered, with a furtive look round. "I know you've a tie in England, and I don't blame you, but—always remember the but——"

"That's what I am endeavouring to do," I replied. "Still, I must consider my position. Meet me in the Gaiety grill-room in two hours' time, and I'll give you my decision. When do you propose to start?"

"To-night," answered Mr. Bodkin, "8.30 train to Harwich for Antwerp. I'll go and get my things together while you put your considering cap on. Only, remember this, Mr. Holdsworth, you sometimes get to your journey's end by a route you never thought of." So saying, he disappeared in his usual noiseless fashion.

What did his last words mean? Did he

know that Mr. Barbican had taken Hetty abroad? Or was this enigmatic utterance one of the mysterious sayings in which Mr. Bodkin was so fond of indulging? I gave the riddle up on getting to my chambers, and, having lighted a pipe, proceeded, pencil in hand, to jot down a number of questions for my guidance. They were roughed out as follows:—

1. Did any connection exist between Martin Baker, the train robber, and Paul Délaz, the vendor of the emeralds to Mr. Barbican?

2. A corollary of the above—Was Paul Délaz concerned in the forgery at Batten & Chirrol's bank?

3. Why should Mr. Barbican try to conceal Hetty not only from me, but also, apparently, from all her friends?

4. Why did the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen visit me under false colours?

5. Why were Mr. Barbican's shop and house broken into?

6. Why did the Grand Duke offer £25,000 for jewels which were certainly not worth that sum in the market?

7. Should I be any nearer the truth by going to Belgium with Bodkin?

8. Was Bodkin to be trusted?



I could answer none of these queries satisfactorily, though I was inclined to say "Yes" to the last. Then arose the inevitable survey of my circumstances. With such a black cloud hanging over me, I knew that it was useless to attempt to obtain employment just at present. And yet I must do something for a living. I found that, including Mr. Barbican's cheque, my whole available capital amounted to £210 3s. 10d. Beyond this sum I had no expectations. On the other hand, there was a possibility of running the thief to earth, and recovering my reputation. Above all, there was the duty of finding Hetty, for it was evident that, despite all her uncle had said, my sweetheart was still true to me and desirous of making explanation—may be in need of my help.

I hastily tossed a few necessaries into my portmanteau. For good or evil my mind was made up, and when I met Mr. Bodkin in the Gaiety grill-room, and he asked, "Well, is it Belgium?" I answered directly, "Belgium, with all my heart!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE REVEREND JOHN BEDDOES.*

I HAVE seen many rivers in my time, in many climes, but I do not know one which compares with the broad and lazy Scheldt. It has a charm entirely its own as it placidly travels, with its oily, grey waters, towards the North Sea. The quaint, red-roofed villages on its banks, the formal lines of poplars and polled willows harmonise well with the brumous haze which softens the landscape down to an obscure horizon. I had plenty of opportunity for noting these features, for, despite the comfort of the good ship *Colchester*, which had brought Mr. Bodkin and myself from Harwich, I could not sleep. I kept turning over in my mind, with maddening repetition, all the incidents of my strange adventures, and the throb of the engines beat time to my reflections with persistent regularity. Consequently, when the pilot came on board at Flushing, somewhere about six o'clock, I went on deck and paced the planks with

all the assiduity of a naval officer in time of war. I need scarcely say that I left my companion, who occupied the same cabin as myself, profoundly overcome by that sleep which is so erroneously ascribed by tradition to quiet men only. Not that I believed Mr. Bodkin to be either unjust or unconscientious. On the contrary, I felt almost resolved to tell him about the unaccountable departure of Mr. Barbican and Hetty, and ask his advice. But Prudence seemed to hold up a warning finger, and, after debating the "pros" and "cons" with all the impartiality of a judge trying an election petition, I determined to keep the incident to myself, unless it were absolutely necessary to entrust the detective with my confidence. It does not take many words to record this mental argument, but the discussion must have lasted some hours, for, when I had finally arrived at my decision, the spire of Antwerp Cathedral, like a long blue column of smoke, was lifting itself aloft over the flat stretches of green and brown country. The passengers, too, gradually showed themselves—especially a party of Dutch Jews, who had brought a basket of lobsters with them. These they cracked and ate like nuts, throwing the shells into

the river, accompanied by remarks which were, no doubt, highly facetious, as they roared with laughter at the several sallies made. Their unwashed appearance and their dirty meal, combined with their repulsive hilarity, made me beat a retreat below to the saloon, where I found Mr. Bodkin enjoying coffee and ham and eggs. He greeted me with effusion, and begged me to fortify myself with a similar repast. "You see, there's no knowing, Mr. Holdsworth," he urged, "when we shall have the next opportunity of having ham and eggs cooked in the English style. This is my second go, and I've ordered a third. Unless it be devilled kidneys, or sausages and mashed, there's no dish so typical of the ways and means of our tight little island as H. and E., for such is my shorthand way of describing a delicacy to which I've been partial from my youth up until now."

Despite Mr. Bodkin's eloquence, I gave the word for tea and a grilled sole—a combination which my companion observed was only fit for the convalescent ward of a hospital. Breakfast over, we went on deck to smoke our pipes, and right forward in the bow of the vessel Mr. Bodkin begged my attention for a few minutes while he

made a few remarks which he asserted were of infinite value, and to be treasured as the Crown jewels in the Tower of London. He opened fire in this wise.

“Your name is Harry Holdsworth and mine is Joseph Bodkin. That’s granted, isn’t it?”

I nodded, wondering at what he was driving. Mr. Bodkin briskly took up his parable and went on. “That being the case, what are you and what am I? A couple of investigators into crime, two runaway cashiers, a brace of bagmen, or a leash of music-hall *comiques* engaged at the Alcazar in Brussels? Mr. Holdsworth, we are none of these. You are Harold Hamilton, Esquire, of Oxford University. I am your travelling tutor, the Reverend John Beddoes. Doesn’t my garb answer to the name?”

He threw open his long ulster-coat and disclosed a suit of clerical pepper and salt, while a white tie, with a butterfly bow, encircled his all-round collar. My amazed expression must have been agreeable to Mr. Bodkin, for, without pausing for a reply, he exclaimed exultingly, “I see by your phiz that you recognise the ticket, the whole ticket, and nothing but the ticket, my dear pupil, Harold Hamilton!”

I may here remark that Mr. Bodkin, so far from dropping his "h's," always smote those consonants with all the vigour of his tongue, and when he said Harold Hamilton, the alliteration was as distinct as the firing of a fog signal in frosty weather.

"Well," he added, "what have you to say?"

"Only this," I answered, "that I know nothing about Oxford University except in connection with the boat race, the cricket match, and the sports. And I suppose that you are about as well up in the history of the Church of England."

"Stop!" said Mr. Bodkin, with a solemn wave of his hand, "there you wrong me. For ten years and six months I was the vicar's churchwarden at St. Blaise's, Newington Causeway. I doubt if any early martyr was better grounded in the tenets of Conservative Christianity than I am. I know the thirty-nine articles by heart, and most of Hymns, Ancient and Modern. I have taken in, week by week, the *Guardian* and the *Church Times*, and no festival of the Sons of the Clergy passes without a subscription from J. B. Had I been able to choose my own profession, Mr. Holdsworth, it would be that of the saving of souls, not

the detection of malefactors. Providence only knows whether by this time I might not have been, I will not say a Dean, but possibly an Archdeacon, hard to be mistaken from a Bishop by those unaccustomed to gaiters. You wrong me, sir, indeed, you do." Mr. Bodkin came to a full stop, quite exhausted by his earnest language. I caught the worthy fellow by the right hand, shook it warmly, and said—

"Forgive me and forget my doubt. But pose as an Oxford man I will not. I should be found out directly. I will be Telemachus to your Mentor," I replied gravely.

Mr. Bodkin eyed me suspiciously. "What do you mean by that? Who's Telemachus and who's Mentor?"

"Worthy people," I answered, "under episcopal countenance. But, as you wish it, I will be Harry Hamilton, in the leading strings of the Reverend John Beddoes."

A gratified smile broke over Mr. Bodkin's countenance. "Thank you sincerely," he replied. "The ambition of my life is partly fulfilled. Henceforth, Harry, I am your father-confessor."

He said this with such complacent pride that I nearly burst out laughing; but my attention was suddenly diverted by the

appearance of one of the huge Atlantic liners of the Red Star Company coming down stream, outward bound. She passed so close to us that I could have jerked a biscuit on board. The passengers on both ships crowded to the side, exchanging salutations by the waving of hats and handkerchiefs. As the ocean leviathan was cutting through the foaming yellow water, Mr. Bodkin grasped me nervously by the arm and pointed to the main deck.

"Look, look!" he said excitedly.

I saw nothing but a collection of men, women, and children gesticulating with energy.

"Don't you see?" asked the detective in a hoarse whisper, as the liner swung past our stern.

"See what? See whom?" I asked impatiently.

"Well," replied Mr. Bodkin, "if that illustrated paper which we saw gave a correct portrait of your Grand Duke, he was standing on the bridge talking to the captain when that steamer passed."

"Nonsense," I said, straining my eyes after the fast-vanishing vessel. "You must be mistaken. It was a pilot, not a Grand Duke, whom you saw."



“Well, of course, I can’t be positive,” remarked Mr. Bodkin, “but there must have been some sort of a likeness, or I shouldn’t have noticed it. I wish you’d have clapped eyes on the gentleman, because you know the Grand Duke, and I don’t.”

I wished sincerely that I had, but the idea of this illustrious personage setting forth for America from Antwerp so soon after his appearance in London seemed to me altogether impossible and preposterous. I began to think that Mr. Bodkin lived in a world of dreams, and imagined every strange face to belong to some character in the drama in which we ourselves were involved. However, ten minutes afterwards the *Colchester* was alongside the quay, and Mr. Bodkin and I were fighting our way through the hotel touts to the nearest *voiture de place*. Having been once before in Antwerp, I knew what hostelry to seek, and bade the coachman go to the St. Antoine, hard by the Place Verte. There we were received by genial Monsieur Joseph, the manager, who begged us to inscribe our names. Pen in hand, I was about to attack the visitors’ book, when Mr. Bodkin thrust me on one side, and celebrated our arrival with this description—“Rev. John Beddoes,

Paddington, Angleterre"; "H. Hamilton, Esq., Scarborough."

"I knew you'd forget, if I hadn't stopped you," he whispered, as we followed the official in a linen jacket who answers to the boots at a British inn.

I acknowledged that he was right. "But," I added, "I've stayed here before as Harry Holdsworth."

"So have I," he rejoined, "as Sir Christopher Harlowe, when I was looking up the Venezuela Bank frauds. As the poet says, 'What's in a name?' and I reply, 'M or N, as the case may be.'"

After what Mr. Bodkin called "a wash and brush up," we had a most enjoyable *déjeuner à la fourchette* under the glass verandah looking on the court, where the fountain is incessantly plashing on the plants and the gold-fish. Mr. Bodkin, in his assumed character of an Anglican clergyman, took the opportunity, as we were sipping our liqueurs, of asking the Head Waiter whether an English church existed, and if so, if any week-day services were held. The Head Waiter assured his reverence that he would make all possible inquiry, but that he had not much faith in the week-day prayers. Most Anglican divines visited the Cathedral

St. Jacques, and other places of worship, where, no doubt, the pictures and works of art conduced to their enjoyment of holy things in a foreign country. Mr. Bodkin, with an air of profound resignation, thanked the Head Waiter for his information, said that he was commissioned by the Bishop of London to inquire into these matters, and called for another glass of green Chartreuse.

“There’s nothing like establishing one’s character,” he observed with a wink, as the master of the male menials departed to execute his commission. “I’ll lay you five to one in cigars that our smooth-tongued friend has never had such questions put to him by real clergymen since he’s been in this hotel.”

“I don’t grasp your object,” I said with a touch of sarcasm. “Your sacerdotal scheme may be all right so far as the concealment of your own identity is in question, but why force your priestly *incognito* down the throats of those beings—such as the Head Waiter—who don’t care a fig whether you are angel or Antichrist?”

“For shame,” said Mr. Bodkin, “you shouldn’t talk in that irresponsible and irreverent way. I may be acting, but I feel what I’m playing.” And with that he tossed

down the Chartreuse, which a minor waiter deposited in front of him. "And I intend to be every bit as good as if I'd been properly ordained." So saying, he put on his hat, which I perceived was a brand-new one, with a tasselled cord round the crown, and a broad brim—the sort of head-covering which is, I am given to understand, described in the trade as a "Clerical-Tourist."

"Granted that you are quite right in keeping up this masquerade," I said coldly, "what is your first move going to be on the board, where checkmate seems inevitable?"

"I'm going to the Red Star Line office," he answered, "to get the list of passengers and the name of the boat which sailed to-day for New York. You didn't happen to catch it, I suppose?"

"No," I replied indifferently, "and if I had, I don't suppose that it would help us in any way."

"There I must differ with you, Mr. H.," he broke in hotly. "If I can ascertain that the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen was on board of that steamer, I shall have a clue, which ought to be followed up."

"I never listened to such nonsense in my life," I said with equal vehemence. "I allow that the Grand Duke's visit to me was not

quite in proper form, but you must remember that the disappearance of the emeralds has parted him and his affianced bride—possibly for ever. Without a doubt he wants to recover the gems. Why should he, the ruler of a prosperous principality, young, rich, and handsome, start off to America when all his interests are centred in Europe? I tell you that your notion is absurd.”

“I’ve got no notion,” remarked Mr. Bodkin with clerical dignity; “I’m only going to satisfy my curiosity. I conclude you’ll not accompany me?”

“No,” I said, “I’ll take the tram to the station, and have a look at the animals in the Zoo—I’ve heard the collection is as good as our own.”

“Very good, Mr. H.,” said Mr. Bodkin placidly, “and if there should be a jackdaw in borrowed plumes in one of the aviaries, think kindly of your very reverend tutor.”

With that he went out through the hotel archway. I was soon on my way to the Zoological Gardens, and a very excellent exhibition of furred and feathered creatures I found it to be, as well as an ideal playground for the young folk of Antwerp, who drove about in pony and goat carriages, practised gymnastics, and danced to a capital

military band with the profoundest contempt for natural history, while their mammas and nurses consumed light refreshments and cakes at the little tables overshadowed by a big panorama commemorative of the Franco-German war. I strolled about the grounds without any definite purpose. I wanted to be "distracted" from my thoughts, and so, to a certain extent, I was, though ever and anon, when I came across a couple of geese, or some flamingoes, in vehement dispute about nothing, I wondered why I had not gone with Mr. Bodkin to the Red Star office. We had had no dispute, and yet these birds reminded me that there was a difference of opinion between us, and I felt uncomfortable in spirit. Perhaps I ought to have accompanied him? Pondering over this question, I was strolling past the noisy, chained parrots—macaws and cockatoos—towards the entrance gate when Mr. Bodkin himself came towards me—

"Any news," I asked, "of the Grand Duke?"

"None," he answered, "but I've just met a mutual acquaintance."

"Who?"

"Mr. Barbican. He said that he had run over from Brussels, and was going back

to-night. I told him that you were with me."

"Then," I cried impetuously, "I think that you were a consummate ass!"

"Amen!" replied Mr. Bodkin devoutly, without any show of anger at my inconsiderate language, "for, directly I mentioned your name, he said that he was leaving Brussels to-morrow."

"Was he alone?" I inquired, trying to control my feelings.

"Of course he was," answered Mr. Bodkin. "Now, Mr. Holdsworth, don't you think you ought to trust me more than you do?"

"I don't understand your insinuation," I retorted.

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Bodkin, "but sooner or later you will."

I answered not a word, but abruptly quitted him, and left the Rev. John Beddoes to his own company. What right had he to pry into my private affairs? And yet, I longed to know more of his meeting with Mr. Barbican.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *TWO UNPROTECTED FEMALES.*

I WAS so angry with everything and everybody that I strode away without knowing or caring whither I was going. The tinkle of the tramcars, a band playing in the Place Verte, the incessant carillon from the Cathedral tower, the "slop" of the sabots on the stone pavements, and the mingled French and Flemish jargon of the people in the streets, acted on my nerves like oil poured on a fire. I longed to be alone and at rest. At last my footsteps carried me away from the turmoil of the city into some pleasant park-like grounds, with a pond of rather dirty water meandering between the trees. I sank down on a bench to consider what course I should pursue, and at last determined that an immediate departure for Brussels should be my next move. There, at all events, I might obtain some information about Hetty, or find some trace of her and



her uncle. The hope seemed somewhat forlorn, but a chance was a chance, were it ever so small. I would go back to the hotel, make my peace with Bodkin, and endeavour to gather some more precise particulars with regard to his interview with Mr. Barbican. With some difficulty I found my way to the St. Antoine. Almost the first person I saw on entering the courtyard was the excellent Mr. Beddoes, engaged in conversation with two elderly ladies — evidently travelling spinsters — attired in the extraordinary garb affected by unprotected British females on the Continent. They were all three sitting round one of the little tables consuming coffee, and I could gather from their admiring gestures that Mr. Bodkin was communicating to them a discourse of singular interest—no doubt some of his theories with regard to the mission of the Church of England. I felt very annoyed at this display of conceit on the part of Bodkin, and was about to pass the group and go up to my bedroom to make preparations for departure when my companion hailed me in the most affable tone.

“One moment, my dear Harry,” he

exclaimed, beckoning to me to approach; "perhaps you can help these ladies?" And, turning to the fair travellers, he added, "Permit me to make you acquainted with my pupil, Mr. Harold Hamilton? He looks older than he is, but that is not a misfortune at his time of life. I would I could say the same. Harry, these ladies are Miss Leckington and Miss Anna Leckington."

I bowed, and the spinsters returned my salute with most gracious smiles. The elder appeared about forty-five—a plump, jolly, blue-eyed person, with thick bands of white hair beneath her checked fishing-cap; the other was small and thin, with frizzy black hair, sharp brown eyes, and rather thick lips—having, as I put it mentally, "a touch of the tar brush" in her veins.

"Miss Leckington and her sister," continued Mr. Bodkin, "are going to Spa, and will stop a few days at Brussels on their way. Now, like myself, they have never been in that capital before. You have, I know. Therefore, which hotel would you recommend to their notice? They wish to be near the Protestant churches."

"Of course," said Miss Leckington, "and the picture galleries."

"And the King's Palace," chimed in Miss

Anna. "Now, do sit down and advise us, Mr. Hamilton." Inwardly reviling Mr. Bodkin-Beddoes for his folly, I joined the circle and suggested the Hôtel de l'Europe. This gave the signal for a volley of inquiries on all sorts of topics connected with Brussels. Which was the best way to get to Waterloo? Was the opera good? Was it safe for ladies to walk about without a commissionaire? Who was the best money-changer? Was there a reliable English chemist? and fifty more queries of a like nature. I answered them to the best of my ability, and then, during a lull in the onslaught, pleaded that I had letters to write and must catch the post. The Misses Leckington were profuse in their thanks for my information, and apologies for having taken up my valuable time. Mr. Bodkin took upon himself to assure them that he was certain I was only too glad to be of service, as he was, indeed, himself. He then suggested our meeting at the *table d'hôte*, and, gallantly waving his hat, took my arm in the most paternal fashion, the while I was boiling with suppressed indignation, the more so as I could hear him chuckling with merriment, no doubt at having made a fool of me for the nonce. I shook his hand off

as we entered the hall, and was about to remonstrate with him on his conduct, when he grasped me tightly by the left arm and whispered—

“For God’s sake, not here, Mr. Holdsworth.”

I was so impressed by the man’s manner that I forebore to speak, and followed him sullenly up the stairs and into his apartment. Mr. Bodkin’s conduct was extraordinary. Carefully closing the door, he put his right forefinger to his lips, and then, rushing to the bed, buried his head in the pillow, and gave way to vehement but smothered laughter. I began to think that he had gone suddenly mad. Full of rage, I said nothing until Mr. Bodkin had finished his performance and rose to his feet, very red in the face, and mopping his forehead with a large bandana handkerchief, considerably stained with snuff. His countenance wore an extremely pleasant appearance, and his red lips were parted in a very broad grin.

“What’s the meaning”——I began, but he interrupted me.

“Stop,” he said, “don’t talk too loud. It’s in this way. After you’d made tracks so abruptly this morning, I came back here

and was looking at the large map of Belgian railways hanging in the hall, when a fly drives up, and out step those lovely creatures whom we have just left below. I didn't pay much attention to them until they went to write their names in the visitors' book at the desk, which is covered by a bit of a wall from where I was standing. I heard the porter point out what they were to do—pretty innocents!—and also heard one of them say, 'I think a friend of ours is staying here, Mr. Jenkin Barbican of London.' Now, don't interrupt me. At this I pricked up my ears, but there was no sound but the rustling of the leaves. Meantime, the cabman, who hadn't been paid, was still standing by the entrance. So I sauntered up to him, and in a casual way asked—he could speak English—whence he had brought the ladies? He answered, from the station, and that they had just come in by the Brussels express—remember that, the Brussels express. I gave the man half a franc, and got back to the map just as the precious pair were following the boots, or whatever they call him here, with their parcels to their rooms. They had to pass me quite close, and I took, quite politely, close stock of the innocent females.

That was quite enough. I knew them directly, though they didn't know me."

"And who on earth are they?" I asked, quite oblivious of my own business, and quite carried away by Mr. Bodkin's eloquence.

"Two of the smartest jewel robbers in the world," replied Mr. Bodkin complacently.

"What! those two women?" I said incredulously.

"One woman, if you please!" observed the detective. "The little wiry one is the husband of the other. They're Americans, and, with a score of other *aliases*, are best known as Mr. and Mrs. Larorna. They're about as sharp as a glazier's diamond, and cunning as the proverbial monkey. But they didn't do me."

"How did you recognise them?" I asked, quite interested in Mr. Bodkin's recital.

"I was present in Court during every day of their trial in New York for the theft of Mrs. Vanderboom's diamonds, and I never forget a face," said Mr. Bodkin. "And they got off by squaring the prosecution, the jury, and, they do say, the judge. You see, Mrs. Vanderboom wasn't living with her husband, the millionaire, and it was rather a nice point as to whom the jewels really belonged. Oddly enough, she afterwards got a divorce,

and married the very judge I'm speaking of. These little affairs count for nothing in the States. However, to return to our lambs. I waited about in the courtyard till they came downstairs, and took the opportunity of collecting all the English newspapers. By and by the beauties appeared, and did exactly what I thought they would—called for the *Times*. I'd already looked through the agony column. This," said Mr. Bodkin, producing his notebook, "is what they wanted to see—'MOOR. *I can. Antwerp*. Possibly Read *Star*,' which, being interpreted, means—'Barbican at Antwerp, possibly Red Star.' That's simple as A B C. Of course, directly Miss Leckington asked for the paper I was up on my legs and proffering it with the greatest politeness possible. The dear things were full of thanks; wanted to see if a dear cousin's marriage was in the paper. Then they played up the game beautifully to the Anglican divine, and I played back as well as they did. When you came in you helped the game wonderfully. And as they've taken such a fancy to Brussels, they shall go back there."

"Indeed!" I said ironically. "Who'll send them there?"

"I shall," quietly responded Mr. Bodkin.

"How?" I asked, with a derisive smile.

"Leave that to me," he answered. "And, now, let me inquire why you cut up so rough when I told you about my meeting with Mr. Barbican? Stop, you needn't tell me. Of course, I know that you were engaged to be married to his niece, but that being all off, why try and follow her?"

"In the first place, because it is not all off; and in the second, because it shall never be all off; and in the third, because I am sure that Barbican has some motive other than that Police Court business for preventing my meeting with Miss Cameron."

"I don't say you're wrong. I only invite you to trust me. I know you're keeping something back. Now, here's my hand, Mr. Holdsworth, and may I be struck dumb if ever I deal false with you, so long as you go straight with me."

I could see honesty in his eyes, and there was a sort of tremor in his voice. We "gripped" hard and fast. Then, without any preamble, I told him about my adventure and pursuit of the cab to Charing Cross. Mr. Bodkin heard me in his usual phlegmatic fashion, and when I had finished, observed, "You'd better have told me this before I



met Mr. Barbican. He knows something more than either of us, and so does Miss Cameron."

"Hetty! Miss Cameron! Nonsense!" I cried.

"Yes, she does!" said the detective doggedly; "and what is more, that's the reason why her uncle wants to keep her out of your way."

"The reason! What reason?"

"Because he's afraid she'll split."

"What absurdity! Do you suppose that Barbican and Miss Cameron have connived to steal those accursed emeralds? You're talking foolishly, Mr. Bodkin—even rashly."

"Not a bit of it," said the detective composedly. "I will suggest that Mr. Barbican didn't steal the jewels; of course, Miss Cameron isn't winking at any such thing; but that Mr. Barbican has got some special information about them which he doesn't want you to know—and for that matter, me to know—is as clear to me as if I had the proof before me in black and white."

"Did he hint at anything of the sort when you met him?"

"Of course he didn't. It was his hurry to get away which roused my suspicions. You think that we had a long confab

together? Nothing of the sort. I can't tell you any more about our meeting than I've done already, except this, that he was terribly surprised, and I may say annoyed, to meet me. Why, I only saw him about those two strange housebreakings the day before yesterday, and then the mention of your name sent him off like a fox before the cry of the hounds. And talking of hounds, more than ever must we work in couples, without giving tongue."

"What do you propose doing, Mr. Bodkin? We seem to be in an inextricable maze," I retorted. "How do you mean to pick up the threads?"

"By patience. Your observation about the maze is good. Now, you've been, no doubt, to Hampton Court, and wandered about those hedges till you were tired trying to get into the centre. And all this time there's been a man on a platform, calmly looking on, who knows every turn and twist, and, if necessary, giving his instructions to go to the right or the left. Well, I mean to be the man on the platform, and you're to be beside me till you've learnt in which way your nose ought to be followed. Then you can go in and have a look round yourself. For, take my word, if some of those who are

unravelling the thread don't know a bit more—nay, a good deal less—than we do.” Mr. Bodkin was so overcome with his metaphor that he had to plunge his thumb and finger several times into his snuff-box.

“And what shall I find when I get into the middle of the maze?” I asked.

“Miss Hetty Cameron,” he said calmly, “and, then, from the platform I'll tell you where to find the emeralds.”

“Amen,” I ejaculated fervently. “I suppose that we shall leave here at once?”

“To-night, for Brussels after the *table d'hôte*, and don't forget to keep up your character, for we shall have the Misses Leckington as our travelling companions.”

“That couple of thieves!”

“You have correctly described them. Come up with me as far as the railway station. There's no time to be lost.”

We were soon in a carriage going at its best pace over the hard, rough stones of the Place de Meer. Just before getting to the station, Mr. Bodkin stopped the cab and sauntered into one of the Bavarian beer saloons, which abound in the neighbourhood, and called for two *bocks*. His taste for light ale was evidently always to be appeased before anything. But directly we were

seated, he drew a sheet of paper and an envelope from his pocket-book, and showed them to me. They bore the official stamp of the Red Star Line office in Antwerp.

"I picked them up this morning," observed Mr. Bodkin, "in case of necessity; they'll certainly come in useful."

So saying, he began to write with a pencil, and soon produced the result, which was simply this:—

"Moor I can. Back Brussels."

He folded up the paper and placed it in the envelope, which he addressed in a disguised hand to—

"Miss Leckington, (try) Hôtel St. Antoine."

"Now," he said, "you stay here. I'll be back in a minute."

With this he left the café, and very soon returned.

"It's all right," he whispered; "I got a commissionaire to take the letter, and gave him five francs to impress upon the porter that it was handed to him by an elderly English gentleman in a great hurry to catch the train for Brussels. It's long odds on Mr. and Mrs. Larorna sharing the same compartment with us on the railway to-night. Now, let's stroll back and see how the charm works. Only, remember, we've got to

announce our departure first. But we can take our time."

On arrival, the Rev. John Beddoes sent up his card to Miss Leckington, inscribed:—

"Have to go on to Brussels this evening after dinner, to meet Bishop of Gibraltar. Can I be of any service to you?"

Back came the answer on half a sheet of notepaper twisted into a cocked hat:—

"Dear Sir,—We, too, are suddenly summoned to Brussels. May we accompany you? Please say 'Yes' at *table d'hôte*.—Yours in haste, Selina Leckington."

"The fish has bitten," observed Mr. Bodkin complacently, as he went into the *salle à manger* and ordered four seats to be reserved. I shall never forget that meal. As my companion afterwards observed, "the ball was kept a-rolling" so beautifully that we might have been really what we pretended to be, and our doings and conversation taken down and published as "A Photograph from Life." The ladies were so innocently affable, Mr. Bodkin was so Anglican, and I was so delightfully subservient to his rule. The comedy could not have been better played. But, all the time, when I looked on the person who answered to the name of Miss Anna, I could not believe that she, or rather he, was

masquerading in travestie. Nor could I credit the detective's assertion that they were Americans. They had not a trace of twang, and, to all appearance, were English born and bred. They explained that their hurried departure from Antwerp was necessitated by their meeting their brother on his way to Homburg. We agreed together to leave by the 9.15 train. "So inexpressibly nice to meet with friends at short notice," said Miss Leckington, with one of her beaming smiles, when they left us to collect their wraps. As they did so, Mr. Bodkin drew me into the side hall.

"Great Christopher!" he exclaimed *sotto voce*, "if I'm not daft, I've made another discovery."

"What's that?" I asked. "I'm not the least surprised."

"You will be, I think," he rejoined, "when I tell you I am sure that the man-woman is none other than the individual known as Paul Délaz. Hush! here they come."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *BEDDOES AND BRUSSELS.*

AFTER Mr. Bodkin's disclosure, it is easy to understand that my short journey to Brussels was accomplished under very disquieting circumstances, the more so as the supposed Paul Délaz was my opposite neighbour in the stuffy first-class carriage which the detective managed to secure for ourselves by presenting the guard with a five-franc piece. Both he and his wife—always assuming Bodkin's information to be correct—wore thick veils, and I could see but little of their play of countenance, but as amateur actors they were perfect. They prattled with an innocence which might have been chronicled by Miss Mitford or Mrs. Gaskell, and talked of "parish work" and "Dorcas meetings" with a sympathetic glibness worthy of a May symposium at Exeter Hall. When we halted at Malines, Miss Leckington (I must call her by her *nom de guerre*) asked whether this was not the spot where

Wycliffe was burnt alive? And when Mr. Bodkin remarked that the town was also famous for its lace, Miss Anna inquired whether it was still cushion work? I must say that, as the Reverend John Beddoes, my companion left nothing to be desired; and once, when a date was in question, the rascal produced a "Church Almanack" from his pocket, and gravely gave the necessary information. As to myself, I was so astonished at his admirable performance that I could scarcely open my mouth, and pleaded a bad headache as the reason of my reserve. Even then Mr. Bodkin took up his cue without hesitation, and shaking his forefinger, observed, with an unctuous smile, "My dear Harry, let us be certain that you really mean headache, and not heartache. God makes, but woman takes." Whereat we all laughed consumedly. "Isn't that so, Miss Leckington?" he continued in most brazen-faced fashion. "Come, speak from your personal experience!"

"You're not my father-confessor, Mr. Beddoes," answered the lady, with a downcast look and a sigh, while Miss Anna tittered.

Under less serious conditions I would have thrown up my part, and declined to play



gooseberry any longer in such an egregious farce. As it was, I had to sit still and take all the cuffs which this clown of a detective chose to bestow on me. Happily the question of inns presently cropped up again. The ladies declared their intention of accepting my recommendation, and making their headquarters the Hôtel de l'Europe. Mr. Bodkin applauded their choice, but added, "I regret to say that Mr. Hamilton and myself will not be sojourners beneath the same roof. The Bishop commands my presence at the Hôtel de Saxe at ten to-morrow morning. I am a restless sleeper, and not an early riser. Therefore, I feel compelled to make his hostelry mine and that of my pupil."

I fancied that an expression of gladness shot from the eyes of my *vis-à-vis*, but both the damsels were loud in their lamentations, and made us promise to call on them on the morrow.

"Not too early, Mr. Beddoes," said Miss Leckington (called Sellie by her supposed sister) "for we, like yourself, do not rival the lark, save in the cause of early praise."

"Wisely and reverently said," observed Mr. Bodkin. "We shall not fail to pay our respects, and, if you have no better engage-

ment, to ask you to join us in a drive to that notable wood of which you made mention, Harry—the Hyde Park of Brussels.”

“You mean the Bois de la Cambre?” I said, tumbling to the situation.

“Precisely, the Bois de la Cambre,” cried Mr. Bodkin enthusiastically, “beneath whose hoary trees our brave soldiers marched to victory or death from that world-famous ballroom where—but you’ve read Byron, Miss Leckington?”

“Only in quotations,” simpered the sham spinster.

“And is not a secular quotation,” ejaculated Mr. Bodkin fervently, “as good a foundation for a soul-stirring discourse as is a text for the commencement for an orthodox sermon? I have preached before now on ‘To be or not to be,’ and have moved a vast congregation to those tears which invariably precede a large collection. But here we are at Brussels. Swift, and all too short, ladies, has been the transit, thanks to the music of your voices.”

As he turned to get his overcoat and umbrella from the rack, I noticed that Mr. Bodkin was nearly purple in the face. This unfortunate risibility of his was, I am only too sure, the cause of great tribulation to

both of us. And yet, when brought before the guns or the bayonets of the enemy, Bodkin was as solemn as a judge who threatens to clear his court for cachinnation in a joke in which he and his usher have obviously joined.

With many expressions of mutual regard, we saw the Misses Leckington into a cab, and we parted with mutual cries of "Don't forget to-morrow." As they drove off, Mr. Bodkin once more produced his snuff-stained bandana and astonished the railway porters with the tremendous effect which he made by blowing his nose—trumpetings such as could not have been equalled by an African elephant caught in an ivory hunter's pitfall. When he subsided, he observed in a hysterical tone of voice, "Neither Buckstone, nor Toole, nor Terry are in it. But I beg your pardon, Mr. Holdsworth, we must do a little business after all this pleasure." He then summoned a carriage with a pair of horses—such conveniences are to be found on the Continent—and having got ourselves "and traps on board," so he put it, bade the coachman drive as fast as he could to number 496 in the Rue de Namur. "I've a friend living there," he explained, "who expects us—not the Bishop of Gibraltar." In a

minute we were rattling along the Boulevard. Mr. Bodkin put his head out of the window and called to the charioteer, "Go round. Don't take the Rue Royale." For a man who had never been in Brussels before, he seemed tolerably well acquainted with the locality.

"And now," he said, as he lighted a cigar, "I'm sure that you want your curiosity satisfied. Don't ask me any questions. First of all: How did I suspect that little limber knave in 'drag' of being Paul Délaz? Answered at once: Because I noticed that, when a fly tickled him on the temple, and he beat it off, his hair was dark underneath his wig; secondly, that he had shaved off his beetling eyebrows, which stood good in Scotland Yard description; and thirdly, that he had a high soprano voice, also in accordance with description. Next, you were going to inquire why I didn't suggest going with them to the Hôtel de l'Europe? Equally easily answered: Because they're not going there, and never intended to do so. Lastly, you want a correctly drawn diagram of the cause of our driving to the Rue de Namur? For the third time, easily replied to: Because one of my men has got rooms there for me, and awaits our arrival. I don't

work altogether on chance, Mr. Holdsworth. He's not a London official—only a cove I picked up here some three years ago—an Englishman by parentage, but in appearance, when he chooses, as rank a Belgian as ever wore a blouse, flew pigeons, or entered his poor blind goldfinch for a singing match. Born at Lacken, where the king's suburban retreat is situated, and knows more about the Congo State and its politics and finances than both our Foreign and Colonial Secretaries put together. A very discreet fellow is John Jackson, or, as he prefers to be called, Jean Jacques, doubtless out of compliment to the eminent revolutionist whose memories and dreams have become so famous. We're just turning into the Rue de Namur."

I was powerless to stop the current of Mr. Bodkin's eloquence, but, just as the carriage slackened its pace, I managed to say, "But tell me before I meet this excellent Rousseau—I mean Jean Jacques—who am I, when we come to close inspection?"

Mr. Bodkin sniggered as he answered, "Why, Mr. Harry Hamilton, my affectionate pupil, to be sure, just as I shall be your doting tutor—the Reverend John Beddoes. You don't suppose that I give anything but

money away to J. J? Not much. When you've caught weasels asleep, seen oysters walk upstairs, caught whales with sprats, and otherwise mystified creation, then——"

But Mr. Bodkin's similes were rudely disturbed by the door of our vehicle being flung open.

"Welcome, Mr. Beddoes," said a man's voice in English, "and you too, Mr. Hamilton. Your rooms are prepared. I'll settle with the cochee." We had scarcely got inside the narrow corridor of the house when we were joined by the speaker, who carried our luggage into the hall. He was a little, clean-shaven man, of nondescript colour, with a pair of spectacles balanced on the end of his puffy snub nose. His pale blue eyes were absolutely lifeless, and his large mouth seemed incapable of expression. He was dressed in a suit of black, and looked like a gentleman's gentleman out of place.

"This way, messieurs," he cried, flinging open the door of a room on the ground floor. It had no carpet, but a few rugs were scattered over the polished *parquet*. Nevertheless the place had an air of comfort about it. There were some good engravings on the walls, a stand of flowers by the window, which was shrouded in delicate lace curtains, a carved

oak bookcase full of well-bound volumes, a piano, and, best of all, a table covered with a white cloth, on which appeared a lobster salad, a cold chicken, and some bottles of wine, together with bread, butter, cheese, and a dish of fruit.

"You see, Mr. Beddoes," said the little man, "that I have made some slight preparations for your comfort. Mr. Hamilton, allow me to present myself. I am John Jackson, better known to the subjects of King Leopold as Jean Jacques. Once more you are welcome."

"Thank you, Jackson, I know we are, and your forethought does you credit," observed Mr. Bodkin, "for we're hungry, at least I am, despite the *table d'hôte* at the St. Antoine. What say you, Harry?"

"I can't say 'No' to this tempting repast," I answered. "Mr. Jackson, you're a man of genius, I am certain."

"Don't say that, sir," said Jean Jacques diffidently. "But I beg of you to taste my salad. If there should be a *soupçon* too much of garlic in the *mayonnaise*, pray let me know. It shall not occur again, believe me. The lobsters came from Blankenberghe this morning, the capon was sent by a breeder at Bois-le-duc, the wine is a Burgundy much liked by the Comte de

Flandre. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"A good deal," replied Mr. Bodkin. "In the first place, have you any lodgers?"

"What a question from *you*, Mr. Beddoes!" ejaculated Jackson. "Of course not. I'll show you your bedrooms; they are *en suite* with this apartment."

"Very good, Jackson," said Mr. Bodkin, "we'll find the way there. But while we are eating our supper, I wish you to take a cab and make some inquiries for me."

John Jackson bowed, but did not open his mouth. He produced a note-book and a pencil.

"To commence with," proceeded Mr. Bodkin, "you will go to the Hôtel de l'Europe, and find out if two English ladies—one stout and fair, age uncertain; the other dark and thin, age also uncertain—have arrived there. If not, you will go to all the principal hotels in Brussels, and make the same inquiry. Give any excuse you like for doing so. They answer to the name of Leckington, and have arrived with us from Antwerp, but undoubtedly were in Brussels yesterday and this morning. You quite understand me on this point?"

"Perfectly," responded Jean Jacques, with-



out a trace of interest in his lack-lustre eyes. "Is that all, Mr. Beddoes?"

"No," Mr. Bodkin went on. "In conjunction with this inquiry, you will try and find out whether an elderly English gentleman, accompanied, in all probability, by a young lady, is known at any of these hotels. His name is Jenkin Barbican."

"Of London, Court jeweller?" put in Jean Jacques quietly.

"Ah! I see you know him," said Mr. Bodkin, not in the least ruffled; "by sight, or by repute?"

"Both," answered Jackson, with the air of a boy who is saying the church catechism. "I met him yesterday in the Montagne de la Cour."

"Was the young lady with him?" I broke in impetuously. Mr. Bodkin elevated his eyebrows. "No, he was alone," replied the Anglo-Belgian. "He went into Suffell's exchange, obtained some money and drove to the Northern Railway station, where he took the train for Antwerp."

"Why did you follow him?" asked Mr. Bodkin, severely, imperturbably assuming a fact.

Mr. Jackson did not wince or hesitate. "Because," he said simply, "I was directed to do so, Mr. Beddoes, by an employer."

“And he is——?” suggested Mr. Bodkin with an engaging smile, or, rather, what he believed to be one. Jean Jacques did not return the inviting grimace, but rejoined, “I am sorry, but I can’t tell you, Mr. Beddoes. However, my business with him is done, as he is no longer in Belgium.”

“Any one I know?” asked Mr. Bodkin curtly, even gruffly.

“Ah! Mr. Beddoes, you know every one,” observed Jackson evasively.

Mr. Bodkin, instead of being displeased, patted the little man on the back in the most benevolent fashion, and said, “I’m glad to see, J. J., that you are so thoroughly trustworthy. You do honour to your profession, my lad. Meanwhile you are losing time; go and carry out my instructions, and report as speedily as may be. Don’t trouble to remove my bag; I may want it again to-night.”

“In any case, I hope you’ll enjoy your supper,” observed John Jackson. “If you want anything, ring the bell, and my boy Kritz will attend to you. He’s quite dumb, having been born without a tongue, but his hearing is all right, and he understands English, German, Spanish, and Italian, as well as French and Flemish. *Au revoir*, gentlemen.”

“What a treasure that boy must be,” cried Mr. Bodkin, as Jackson slammed the street door after him. “I’ll wager, like his master, he’s no fool. Oh! I must interview Master Kritz, and find out if he’s got a brother or a cousin similarly afflicted. But, first of all, to supper,” he added, drawing his chair up to the table. “We can afford to leave business alone for half an hour or so, Mr. Holdsworth. The inner man demands attention. Ah, my friend! without that second self? He it is who provides the statesman with his wits, the warrior with his courage, the scientist with his brains. In this excellent Burgundy I drink to the concealed friend of mankind, and would like to congratulate His Royal Highness of Flanders on the correct state of his palate, as I will Jackson on this sauce, which Soyer would not have disowned.”

So saying, Mr. Bodkin set me such a good example with knife and fork, plate and glass, that, despite my curiosity to know his plans, I followed suit with such hearty determination that, in a short time, only the fragments of the feast remained. Then Mr. Bodkin, producing two very large cigars from a case like a small portmanteau, offered me one, and sank into an easy-chair.

“Now, Mr. Holdsworth,” he said, blowing the blue smoke round the candles, “let me state *imprimis*, as the Latin grammar has it, that I don’t like Barbican’s conduct. Presumably we’re both in his confidence. Practically we’re not. Moreover, I’m to all intents and purposes in his pay. Why doesn’t he trust me? Ah!” he cried, jumping up from his seat as a carriage stopped at the door, “there’s J. J. I know a good deal of his report before he makes it.”

John Jackson came in, placid as ever. At Mr. Bodkin’s invitation, he took a seat, a cigar, and a glass of Hollands and water. Then he began—

“The ladies were not at the Hôtel de l’Europe. They have not been there.”

“Of course not,” observed Mr. Bodkin suavely. “But where did you come across traces of these interesting females?”

“They are passing the night at a modest establishment near the Northern Railway station, called the Hôtel Mirandole; but, before taking up their quarters, they went to the Central Post Office and got a letter. This is all I have ascertained.”

“Very good,” said Mr. Bodkin, “you have worked very well. But what about Mr. Barbican? Is he still in Brussels?”

"No," replied John Jackson. "He left by this evening's train for Liège."

"For Liège!" exclaimed Mr. Bodkin. "What the deuce does he want there?" Then, after a pause, he added, "And I'm off to Liège, too, the first thing in the morning."

"Do you propose that I should accompany you?" I broke in.

"No," replied Mr. Bodkin. "You had better remain in Brussels. Mr. Barbican would certainly object to your society, and you may be of use here. What do you think?"

"One question before I decide," I said. "Tell me, Mr. Jackson, did Mr. Barbican start on his journey alone?"

"Absolutely by himself," answered J. J. "I have verified that fact."

"Then," said I, "I shall stay where I am."

"Wisely resolved," observed Mr. Bodkin. "The more so as I've no doubt but that our friend here could help you in a certain affair concerning yourself and a lady."

J. J. bowed, and begged me to consider himself entirely at my disposal.

Mr. Bodkin's suggestion raised new hopes within me. Hetty must be found.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *J. J. AND I FRATERNISE.*

I WAS not awake when Mr. Bodkin departed for Liège, but he left me a note which ran as follows :—

“DEAR H. H.,—Will write if any news. Trust J. J. as far as you please. Make yourself comfortable.—Yours, J. B.

*P.S.*—Till further notice, communicate Poste Restante, Liège. Keep your eye on the boy Kritz.”

This is exactly what I was doing, as I lay in bed with Mr. Bodkin's missive between my fingers. The lad was arranging my clothes and toilet requirements with singular neatness and celerity. He was not unlike his master in figure, but with gipsy features and an olive complexion. Directly I called him he came to the bedside, but intimated by a sign that he could not speak. Of course I knew this before, but, forgetful that he was not deaf, I began in very bungling fashion to ask on my fingers whether Mr.

Jackson was up? He nodded and pointed to his ears to intimate that he could hear perfectly well. He then produced a small slate on which he wrote for a few seconds and handed it to me. I read, "Mr. Jackson has gone out, but will be back presently. Will you have your breakfast in half an hour? I talk too quickly with my hands for you to understand me. Have you any commands?"

I told him none, and that, when I had had my bath, which he had filled with hot water, I should be perfectly ready for the meal. He then asked me on his tablet if he should shave me, and, on my acquiescing, made the razor fly over my face with all the dexterity of a first-class barber. Clearly Master Kritz had many accomplishments. It was about eleven o'clock when I entered the sitting room, and sat down to a well-arranged breakfast. I could, I fancied, detect the master-hand of J. J. in the omelette au pointes d'asperges, but, on inquiry, I found that this dish, as indeed the whole repast, was due to the culinary skill of Kritz. He brought me the Brussels papers, the London *Evening Standard* of the previous day, made some fresh coffee in a curious steamer, and, in short, waited upon me with the

noiseless activity of a well-taught manservant. The more I saw of Kritz, the more I liked him. I had just settled down in an arm-chair when Jackson appeared, after a regulation knock at the door.

"Everything to your satisfaction, Mr. Hamilton?" he asked, without a scintillation of interest in his cod-fish eyes.

"I've never been more comfortable," I replied; "that boy Kritz is a marvel."

"Yes," he said, "he is decidedly above the average, but he took a deal of teaching."

"Where did you get him?"

"I found him, or rather my dog did."

"Found him, Mr. Jackson?"

"Yes, in a dry ditch, near the Bois de la Cambre. He was then, I should say, two years, and, of course, utterly unable to give any account of himself. Moreover, the poor chap was suffering from thirst and want of food. Had it been winter he must have died, but luckily the September leaves protected him. My dog took him for a hedgehog, and he was certainly the colour of one. I think he must have been abandoned by some travelling Bohemians. I had a great trouble with him at first, but my poor mother, who's dead now, took him in hand, and there he is, Mr. Hamilton."



“Why do you call him Kritz?”

“Because the only sound he ever made sounded like ‘Kritz! Kritz! Kritz!’ He did it by pressing his cheek against his gum. I suppose, though he had no tongue, it was an attempt to speak. He never does it now. I sometimes wonder if it wouldn’t be possible to fit him with a false tongue. But he’s happy enough as he is, and wouldn’t be half so valuable as an assistant if he could talk. And now, Mr. Hamilton, last night Mr. Beddoes suggested that I might be of service to you. If so, I am at your disposal, but don’t tell me anything which you don’t want me to know.”

J. J. uttered the last words with a certain amount of emphasis, and I appreciated his delicacy of feeling.

“Well,” I said, after a pause, “the fact is this, I am very much interested in a young lady who, I believe, accompanied Mr. Barbican to Brussels. Here is her photograph. Have you seen her with Mr. Barbican?”

“Yes,” answered J. J., after closely inspecting the portrait, “I have once, and once only, but she did not stay at the same hotel as he did.”

“Where did you see her?” I asked anxiously.

“Where I saw Mr. Barbican last night—at the Northern Railway station. They had evidently just arrived from Ostend. Two ladies received them when they alighted, and, with these, Miss——”

“Cameron,” I put in.

“Miss Cameron drove away. Mr. Barbican remained behind after bidding her farewell, without much affection, I thought.”

“You don’t know where they went to?”

“No, it was no business of mine. I had to look after the old gentleman.”

“Should you know the ladies again? Were they old or young?”

“One was middle-aged, the other, a tall girl with very golden hair; both were thickly veiled, and I did not see their features.”

“Did they appear on familiar terms with Miss Cameron?”

“Not at all. They barely shook hands, and Miss Cameron made a kind of curtsey when the younger lady extended her fingers to her. I should say that the middle-aged was the governess or attendant of the other. They were both dressed in black costumes, very well made. I believe that I should recognise them again by their style. The younger one, especially, had a lovely figure, and walked like a real duchess. They

drove off in a very neat carriage with a pair of horses, but the equipage was evidently hired. It seems to me that, in order to get a clue, we must try and find the job-master."

"The very thing," I cried excitedly. "Let us go round to all the job-masters in Brussels, and at once."

"Softly, Mr. Hamilton," observed J. J. with his usual placidity. "In the first place, let me tell you that job-masters are very reticent persons, and, when well paid, don't readily give any information about their employers. In the second, Miss Cameron did not appear to be going to stay with these ladies, for she had no luggage with her, not even a handbag."

J. J.'s remarks fell like a shower of iced water on my ardour.

"But," I cried, "you have just suggested finding the job-master?"

"I repeat the suggestion," said J. J. quietly, "but I beg of you not to be too sanguine. I'll start operations at once."

So saying, he rapidly jotted down some memoranda on a sheet of paper and summoned Kritz. "Here, my lad," he said to the mute, "are some instructions for you. Get your hat and be off at once. Try the *loueurs de voitures* who deal with foreigners first.

Take your time, and keep your ears and eyes open."

Kritz vanished like a streak of lightning. When he had gone, J. J. observed, "We could not have had a better messenger."

"Why," I said, "he won't be able to make himself understood."

"Won't he, Mr. Hamilton? You are mistaken. He'll play the part of a foreign groom who has been lost, and can't speak French, to perfection. Trust Kritz."

"But, Mr. Jackson," I urged, "how do you account for the fact that Miss Cameron had no luggage with her? What had she done with it? I saw two large lady's trunks on the cab which took her to Charing Cross."

"Oh, you saw her start on her journey, did you?" said J. J. without the least sign of interest. "You didn't tell me that."

"I didn't see her off by the train," I replied, feeling rather shamefaced, "but I saw Miss Cameron and her uncle, Mr. Barbican, on their way to the station. The train had started before I had got to the platform."

Then I produced the scrap of paper which Hetty had dropped in the street, and explained how a cab wheel had gone

over it. J. J. examined the fragment for some seconds, and then, holding it up, asked—

“Does anything strike you with regard to this?”

“Nothing,” I answered, “except that several words have been obliterated. What strikes you, Mr. Jackson?”

“Merely this,” he replied, “that, if Miss Cameron had only been travelling to Brussels, she would scarcely have taken the trouble to add ‘Belgium’ to an address, for an address this evidently is, or rather was.”

“By George!” I muttered, “I never thought of that. What a fool I am! But still, you haven’t answered my question about the luggage?”

“Because I know where it was deposited.”

“Where?” I asked anxiously.

“At the cloak-room of the Northern Railway station,” said J. J. calmly.

“Come along,” I cried, “let’s be off there at once!”

“Again softly, softly, Mr. Hamilton,” murmured J. J., with a deprecatory wave of his hands. “The luggage is no longer there. It was fetched away by some unknown person an hour after Miss Cameron’s arrival in Brussels.”

"Then Barbican must have taken it!" I cried hotly.

"No, Mr. Barbican did not, Mr. Hamilton. All his doings came within my sphere of observation, and you may take my word on this point, nor did Miss Cameron remove the luggage herself. A foreign footman fetched and handed it over to a railway porter, who possibly, nay, probably, put it into a train. But as I've already told you, Miss Cameron's doings had no interest for me."

"But, by heaven, they have for me, Mr. Jackson. What you have told me makes me more anxious than ever. This poor girl is in a strange country, without friends."

"Pardon me," interrupted J. J., "are you sure that Miss Cameron has no friends in Belgium, as most certainly she has acquaintances?"

"None that I ever heard of," I replied. "Miss Cameron has never, to the best of my belief, been on the Continent before."

"She has had no foreign governess?" continued J. J.; "been at no school where she would have foreign fellow-pupils; or met with no foreign associates in society?"

I shook my head impatiently. Jean Jacques proceeded with his inquiry—"Have any of Miss Cameron's relatives frequented the Continent?"

A light broke on me. "Good heavens!" I cried, "I had quite forgotten. Her own mother was half French. That's how she comes to speak and write French so well."

"Ah! this is satisfactory," observed J. J., still unemotional, "but it does not lead to much. Has Miss Cameron ever mentioned any foreign cousins?"

"Never," I replied. "She once told me that her grandmother had broken with her family because she had turned Protestant. Her mother, who is dead, had never been abroad."

"You are sure that Miss Cameron's grandmother was French, not Belgian or Swiss?"

"I can only tell you what she told me."

"You don't remember the family name?"

"No, nor have I ever heard it."

"One last question—Was Mrs. Cameron Mr. Barbican's sister?"

"Of course she was. The French lady was Mr. Barbican's mother."

"Thank you, Mr. Hamilton," said J. J. gently. "You have supplied something which may be of use."

"How? in what way?"

"Merely that Mr. Barbican must, if not personally acquainted with his foreign kindred, have been perfectly well aware of their existence. I suppose that he has,

in the way of business, often been on the Continent?"

"Yes, continually," I replied hastily; "that's how he came to buy those cursed Zarinthian emeralds."

"The Zarinthian emeralds!" echoed J. J. dreamily. "Of course he was mixed up in that strange affair, of which, no doubt, you have read in the papers."

"Yes, every one has," I said roughly. "And I don't want to hear any more about them. The thief will never be caught."

"Don't make too sure of that," observed J. J. in his inanimate tones, "the jewels have been stolen before and recovered."

"Why! that's what——" I began impetuously as the words of the Grand Duke flashed across me. Then I stopped and finished lamely enough, "How, I mean?"

"By patience, perseverance, and money," said J. J. gravely, "a triple alliance rather hard to beat under any circumstances in all ages."

"Come, Mr. Jackson," I hastened to say to cover my confusion, "I'm longing for a breath of fresh air. If you've nothing better to do, shall we take a turn on the Boulevards?"

"With great pleasure," he answered, "and, with your kind permission, we'll come



back by way of the Galeries St. Hubert, through the Basse Ville. One moment while I give myself a polish." And he glided out of the room.

When he had gone, I bitterly reproached myself with my indiscretion with regard to the Zarinthian emeralds, for, though Jean Jacques had not displayed the slightest emotion on hearing them mentioned, it was evident that he knew all about them. It was singular, moreover, that he should have referred to the jewels having been stolen before. I determined to be on my guard in future, and, if possible, to collect some information about the previous thefts. But, after all, what were all the gems in the world to my lost Hetty? I thought with inward rage of the unlucky incident by which I had lost trace of her. What would she think of me? There was just the chance that she had written to me in London. Seizing a pen and ink, I wrote off to the housekeeper at my "chambers," asking her to forward any letters to Poste Restante, Brussels. I was just blotting the envelope on J. J.'s elaborate pad when that worthy entered, accompanied by a large, ugly, and very effusive brindled bulldog.

"You see," observed J. J., "that I don't forget that I'm an Englishman, dog included."

He made this statement without any show of British vainglory. Nevertheless, J. J.'s appearance was worthy of considerable attention. On his head he wore a very broad-brimmed and very shiny silk hat; his throat was encircled by a high-standing collar, striped horizontally with red and white; below it a plaid scarf appeared, adorned with a diamond-studded horseshoe pin, which contrasted finely with a double-breasted waistcoat, displaying onyx buttons, and crossed with a massive curb watch-chain. His cutaway coat and tight trousers were of large shepherd's plaid. From his breast pocket protruded a scarlet silk handkerchief, and his patent leather pointed boots were surmounted with white jean "spats." In his left hand he carried a pair of very yellow dogskin gloves, and a "whangee" cane with a crutch handle. Altogether, J. J. looked like a French comedian attired to represent an English racing man. I beheld him with admiration, and a strong inclination to burst out laughing.

"I'm fond of sport," remarked J. J. complacently, "especially since I've come to be regarded as a betting man, and one of the greatest handicap authorities in Brussels."

If Jean Jacques had winked at that

moment, I should have exploded, but he was as solemn as a judge.

“And now, if you please, Mr. Hamilton,” he said, as we sallied forth into the sunshine, “we’ll leave the Boulevards till another day. There’s no life on them like their namesakes in Paris. We’ll just stroll gently along this street, across the Place Royale, and down the Montagne de la Cour.”

Of course I assented, and with the great bulldog walking sedately at our heels, two, at least, of the trio attracted considerable attention. I noticed that Mr. Jackson seemed to have a great many acquaintances, to whose salutations he replied by lifting his superb hat at least half a foot off his well-oiled locks, but he never moved a muscle on his sphynxlike countenance. Their smiles were acknowledged, but never reciprocated. Having crossed the square where Godfrey de Bouillon flings his banner on high, J. J. suggested looking in at the English tavern, where he was greeted by a real British barmaid with great cordiality—indeed, she adorned my companion’s buttonhole with a large pink rose, which added not a little to the splendour of his aspect. But he made no complimentary response, but drank his bottle of Guinness with the air of a stoic

philosopher. A young fellow, evidently a Belgian, who was consuming Scotch whiskey and soda, approached J. J., and asked him to lay odds against some horse for the Goodwood Cup. After some discussion, J. J. produced a silver-mounted pocket-book and recorded the bet. The Belgian called for more whiskey, and was telling the barmaid that he was *un véritable gaidock* when we left the establishment.

"Has the horse any chance?" I asked.

"None whatever," replied Jean Jacques demurely. "It won't start. But it pleases that young man, and doesn't hurt me."

With its bright shops and irregular turnings, the Montagne de la Cour is assuredly one of the most picturesque, as well as one of the busiest, thoroughfares in Europe. I was quite sorry when we got to the bottom and turned into the Galeries. We had not gone more than half a dozen paces when J. J. pinched my arm and pointed with his stick. Just ahead of us was Master Kritz, arm in arm with an individual in livery.

"Not a word, if you please," whispered J. J., "or you'll spoil everything. Let us go home."

## CHAPTER X.

*MR. AND MRS. DICK THORPE.*

JEAN JACQUES apologised to me for his abrupt behaviour in the Galeries. "You see, Mr. Hamilton," he said, "I was anxious to ascertain whether Kritz had taken advantage of a tip which I gave him, and I knew that, if he had, we should see something of him in the Galeries about the time when he and his friend made their appearance. That was why I deferred our stroll on the Boulevards."

I assured the worthy Anglo-Belgian that I quite approved of his prudence, and forebore to ask him any questions on the subject, as I plainly perceived that J. J., without being dumb, could be quite as silent when he chose as Master Kritz himself. When we reached the top of the Montagne de la Cour again, I suddenly remembered that I had not posted my letter to London, and was thinking what excuse I could devise to get rid of my companion while I did so (why, I know not) when he

observed apologetically, "If you could amuse yourself for a couple of hours, Mr. Hamilton, I'd be very much obliged. I want to meet a man on business at the Tavern. You'll find my old housekeeper at home in case you require anything. I shan't in any case be very late."

I assured J. J. that I should much prefer spending my time out of doors, and we parted, I to find a post office and stamps, he, no doubt, to make bets and drink stout. Having despatched my missive, I thought I could not do better than retire to a quiet place and consider the situation of affairs. The Musée suggested itself as a temple of cogitation, and I was soon seated in front of an enormous canvas whereon Rubens had depicted with atrocious reality the martyrdom of some eminent saint. I was not in the least affected by the subject, or curious as to the method of the master, but I am sure that the custodian, with the silver chain round his neck, must have considered me an enthusiast either in religion or art, so long did I remain in front of that glowing illustration of fiendish cruelty. But, in truth, my own sufferings concerned me, and the colour which had gone out of my life was of far more importance than all the pigments of

the florid Fleming. I went over and over again all the extraordinary incidents which had happened since the robbery in the Southampton train, and I felt about as far from land as a shipwrecked mariner tossing on a hencoop in the middle of the ocean. I was certain that, if I could only find Hetty, I should get at least an inkling with regard to her uncle's incomprehensible behaviour. Jackson and Kritz might hit upon a clue, but it was very likely that I should be unable to follow it up to the end, owing to want of resources. The couple of hundred pounds, which represented my entire fortune, would not last long at the game of hue and cry. And the money gone, either success or failure seemed, from the existence point of view, to be absolutely the same. It was not likely that Mr. Barbican would continue to employ Bodkin, while acting diametrically, as it appeared, in opposition to his wishes by taking me about with him. Nor had my late employer said a word about my expenses. He had simply handed me over, as it were, to the detective, with the words, "Bodkin knows what to do." That might have been so once, but now Bodkin seemed not to know what to do. I missed my walking-stick-umbrella very much already.

The unimpressionable J. J. was no substitute for him. I felt that I could confide in Bodkin, and, short as had been our separation, I longed to meet him again. I was still battling in my mind as to what ought, or what ought not, to be done, when a lady and gentleman, both young, planted themselves immediately in front of me, while contemplating the tortured saint.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said the gentleman. "Look at those red-hot pincers tearing at the poor fellow's flesh. 'Pon my word, it makes my blood run cold. What do you say, Lizzie?"

"Oh! it's too horrible, Dick," murmured the lady; "I can't bear to look at it."

"But, note," said he, "the marvellous expressions on their faces. Step back and you'll get the light well on that executioner in the background."

The lady did so rather rapidly, and nearly tripped up over my outstretched legs. The gentleman turned round angrily, but, before a word could be spoken, we were wringing one another's hands.

"What, Harry!" he exclaimed, "who on earth would have thought of meeting you here? My dear, this is my very old chum, Holdsworth, whom I haven't seen for ten



years at least, and this, Harry, is my wife—Mr. Holdsworth—Mrs. Richard Thorpe; Mrs. Richard Thorpe—Mr. Holdsworth. Now, you're properly introduced, thanks to the executioner and Harry's long shanks."

Mrs. Thorpe—a pretty little fair woman—was, in an instant, all smiles, and would not hear of any excuses for my awkwardness. In two minutes we were laughing and joking together as if we had known one another all our lives. Dick Thorpe and I had been very great friends, indeed, at one time. We were at school together at Finchley, and afterwards, when the prospects of both of us were somewhat indefinite, we had shared the same lodgings in London. But Dick's uncle, a great engineer in the North, had called him away to Newcastle, and gradually we lost sight of one another. I had been taken into Mr. Barbican's employ, and, as I had always set my heart upon becoming a barrister, I did not even write to tell Dick of my disappointment. I confess that I was then ashamed of the word "shop," idiot that I was!

"Well, Harry," began Dick, "I suppose you're a Q.C., or something of the sort, by this time?"

"No such luck," I replied. "I was never even called to the bar."

"By Jove," said Dick, "that's a pity. You were always a pretty good speaker. What's your profession?"

"I'm not doing anything just at present," I answered truthfully.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Dick, "a gentleman at large. I wish I were. I would be, only Lizzie won't let me. She believes in Dr. Watts and idle hands up to mischief."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Thorpe, blushing and laughing. "Don't you believe him, Mr. Holdsworth; he it is who can't be quiet. We might be living peacefully in dear old England, but Dick would accept a situation to come and superintend one of those new railways which they are making along the French frontier."

"And why not, young woman?" cried Dick. "It gives you the advantage of travel, and me the opportunity of getting a good deal of practical experience. Now, Harry, what are you going to do to-night? I'm sure you're not engaged. Come and dine with us, and we'll have a chat over old times. You're not married, by the way?"

"No," I said, thinking of my poor Hetty.

“Take my advice,” went on Dick, “and  
\_\_\_\_\_”

“Take care, Mr. Thorpe,” broke in his wife.

“Of course I shall take care. Why don’t you wait till I’ve finished? and do, I was going to say. Now, Harry, it’s a bargain—dinner, 7.30. Don’t expect too much, by the way. We’ve got a Belgian cook, and Lizzie will try and teach her how to make Welsh rarebits and plum puddings.”

“Now, Dick,” Mrs. Thorpe began, but her husband rattled on—

“Don’t trouble to dress. We live in rather an unfashionable part. Here’s our address—96 Rue des Martyres. It’s handy for me, for most of my business is at the Northern station while I’m in Brussels; but, please the contractors, I hope to start for the Meuse—the home of the crayfish, darling—next week. Now, Harry, it’s on, isn’t it?”

Of course I accepted, but I added a proviso—“I may get a telegram calling me away, in which case I’ll let you know.”

“Don’t trouble, old fellow,” said Dick, “I know you’ll come if you can. I wish we could ask you to go for a drive now, but Lizzie has an appointment with the most important personage with whom she is

acquainted in Brussels—her milliner—and I have to go with her, because the education of both has been neglected. Madame Lamode can't speak English, and Lizzie is bad at parley-voo. It was just to while away half an hour that we dropped into the Musée. Harry, when you marry, choose a wife who's not fond of finery."

"I'm sure I haven't a rag fit to wear," said Mrs. Thorpe, with mock indignation.

"There's logic for you," cried Dick. "She'd be content with rags, if only they were fit to wear. Come along, Lizzie, and let's see if Madame's tatters answer to that description. Now, don't forget, Harry—half-past seven, and ring the bell as hard as you can, for the *concierge* has been discharged as incurable from the Deaf Asylum."

Thus we parted, in the best possible spirits. When I reached the lodgings in the Rue de Namur I found J. J., divested of his resplendent attire, awaiting my arrival, but Kritz had not returned, and there was no communication from Bodkin. So there was nothing to prevent my keeping my appointment with the Thorpes. I briefly told J. J. that I had met some English friends unexpectedly, and was going to dine with them that evening.

"It's a real pleasure sometimes to be with your pals," observed J. J., "especially when they come up to time."

"Come up to time! What on earth do you mean, Mr. Jackson?" I said rather warmly. "I haven't seen one of my friends for over ten years, and the other never in my life before."

"I beg pardon, Mr. Hamilton. I thought they might be those you were looking for, especially the party whom you've never seen before."

Mr. Jackson evidently meant this as a cutting remark, but his countenance was as sedately unmoved as ever. I could not forbear from answering him.

"The party to whom you refer is my old friend's wife. Now, do you understand?"

"There's no cause for explanation, Mr. Hamilton, only we do live in such mysterious days that it's difficult to keep going without canning against a dark outsider."

I paid no attention to this sally, but begged J. J. to have a *coupé* at the door at seven o'clock. He took the hint and left me to myself. I was not altogether pleased with my host's prying method, and resolved to baulk his curiosity. Having an hour or so to wait before starting for Thorpe's

domicile, I thought I would write to Mr. Bodkin and consult him with regard to my uncertain position. I got pen, ink, and paper, and took up the blotting pad. Imagine my surprise, when its top sheet appeared in virginal white, and yet, but a little while before, I had pressed on it the letter and envelope which I had sent to London. Who but J. J. could have removed the slip, and what was his object in doing so? The discovery was most disquieting, and I flung down the pen utterly unable to begin my letter to Bodkin. Was J. J. spying on my movements, or was his action inspired by natural and uncontrollable inquisitiveness? The impassive character of the man barred definite explanation in either sense, and yet an answer to one of two reasons must plainly have been the cause. One thing appeared certain, and that was my leaving J. J.'s house at the earliest opportunity, and with the most plausible excuse. I missed more than ever the companionship of the "Rev. John Beddoes." At first I thought of laying the whole matter before Dick Thorpe, but then I reflected that I had no right to give away the secrets of others to a man whom I had every reason to think was a trustworthy friend, but, on the other hand,

had not seen for over a decade. It is extraordinary how, under such conditions, the most irreligious individuals try to remember a Scriptural text applicable to their situation. I could call none to mind, but, odd as it may appear, there came to me the last words of Dumas's immortal "Monte Christo," "Wait and hope," and they afforded me both consolation and resolution. I would abide by the advice of Edmond Dantès; at the same time I doubly determined to be on my guard against J. J. I could not assert, I argued, that he was working against me, but he had, I felt sure, other irons in the fire besides the discovery of Hetty. Thinking over the turn of affairs, I not only fell into a brown study, but also into a deep sleep, from which I was aroused by the monotonous voice of J. J., who, shaking me gently by the shoulder, remarked—

"Excuse me, Mr. Hamilton, it's a quarter to seven. The *fiacre* will be here punctually."

I roused myself and asked—

"Has Kritz returned?"

"No, Mr. Hamilton, but it's evident that he has come across the scent somehow and somewhere. Kritz has got a nose like one of the Duke of Beaufort's foxhounds."

Despite Thorpe's injunction I donned my

swallow-tail garb, and did not keep my charioteer waiting more than five minutes.

"Where to?" asked J. J., as he politely ushered me into the vehicle, having previously entrusted me with a latch-key of Brobdingnagian dimensions.

"The Northern Railway station," I replied, and then, as the *fiacre* rattled over the stones, I would have bitten my tongue out for being such a fool as to try and checkmate J. J. with such a feeble move. Of course, he knew the coachman, and could ascertain my destination whenever he pleased, so I leant out of the window and told Jehu that I had made a mistake; the house to which I was bound was on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, *near* the Northern Railway station. He grunted some unintelligible reply, and continued thrashing his horse, with many expletives, till we reached our destination.

I knew that Dick Thorpe must be in easy circumstances, but I had no idea that his income could provide the luxurious comfort which was apparent in his household. The door was opened by a very smart serving maid, dressed in black with a white cap and apron, while her short skirts revealed neat patent-leather shoes with silver buckles. I



noticed that two other young women in the artistic Oriental Hall were in similar costume. No butler or footman was in evidence. I learned subsequently that this arrangement was a "fad" of Mrs. Thorpe's, who would have no male servants in the house. "So," as Dick observed, "at home I am Adam in the garden of a many-Eved Eden." For which remark he was promptly brought to book, and justly so, by his wife. I was ushered by one of these attractive Hebes into the drawing-room, whereof the walls were literally covered with examples of the best modern foreign masters. Corot's mists were contrasted with Rosa Bonheur's horses and cattle; a horror by Wiertz hung side by side with an exquisite composition, full of subdued colour, by Diaz; the minute realism of Meissonier was directly opposite to the sensuous imagery of Bougereau; the sanctity of Millet was confronted by the fantastic power of Gustave Doré; and the glory of Israels was almost reflected in the cool pools of Maris. It was a sight which would possibly madden a critic, but assuredly make envious a collector. I had time to notice some of these works of art, and also the fine collection of old green "dragon" porcelain, before Dick and his wife entered the *salon*.

I was glad that I had donned the "customary sables," for Mrs. Thorpe was arrayed in some very becoming rose-pink "rags," accompanied by a display of exquisite pearls and diamonds, and Dick of course was *en frac*. I upbraided my friend with his perfidy in endeavouring to entrap me. Dick only laughed and said, "If you'd made your appearance in a shooting suit you'd have been welcome, but the fact of the matter is, we've quite unexpectedly learned that the German Emperor is going to honour us with his presence."

"The German Emperor!" I echoed, aghast.

"What nonsense!" cried Mrs. Thorpe, laughing merrily. "Dick, explain at once."

"Well, it's in this way," said my friend. "We call—I mean, I call—my esteemed father-in-law the Kaiser; he's so autocratic, so self-willed, and so—what shall I say?"

"Generous," put in Mrs. Thorpe.

"Yes, generous—to his own interests," continued Dick. "Now, I daresay that you think Lizzie is a freeborn Englishwoman, because she hasn't the remotest shade of foreign accent; but, for all that, her esteemed papa is of the German—most German. Thanks to the revolution of '48, she was

bred up in our right little, tight little island, where the Kaiser made all his money, but he still remains as obdurately Teutonic as Frederick the Great, or King George the First, of blessed memory. I know that this revelation is unpleasant to Lizzie, who would like to believe that she is of Scotch, Welsh, Irish, Manx, or even Channel Island parentage; but, alas! the fact remains. Do not—I don't—visit the sins of the Kaiser on her innocent head."

Mrs. Thorpe was evidently about to take summary vengeance on Dick with her fan, when the door of the *salon* was flung open, and one of the trim Phyllises announced—"Monsieur le Baron Breckstein!"

A tall, portly old gentleman, with large, white, curled whiskers, and double glasses on his prominent nose, advanced with a pompous stride towards us. But for his age, I could have sworn that I had seen him before. When and where? That question for the moment troubled me.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *I DINE WITH THE KAISER.*

THE dinner served by the damsels in black was, in my poor judgment, exquisite, and the Baron, in his pompous way, did not fail to bestow his august approval on this dish or that sauce. He certainly justified Thorpe's nickname of the "Kaiser," for not only was his speech arrogant, but his manners were dictatorial, and he almost commanded us to take a second helping of two or three *plats* which pleased his palate. Dick, evidently to the alarm of his wife, took several opportunities of testing his father-in-law's sense of the ridiculous, but the old gentleman was hide-bound in his own importance. To me, who wondered at his identity, he was extremely gracious, and took the opportunity of pointing out that the commercial prosperity of England was entirely due to the Germans, who interested themselves in her trade.

“Without the Teutonic hard-laborious impetus which pervades your London, your Birmingham, your Manchester, you would be out-thrown by your continental competitors. Look at myself, Mr. Holdsworth! I arrive in your country without money, without introduction, without even knowledge of your language. But I work. I live on soup, when your Englishman asks for beefsteak. I chain myself to my desk, and save capital from my small but all-sufficient salary, and I become rich. I am decorated, and I am ennobled. There is a Providence which looks after and, in some not-to-be-explained fashion, directs the industrious German. No pudding without proof. Behold it.”

And the Baron slapped his chest with much complacency as he added, “When I have my fingers in a pie, then the birds begin to sing.”

Before dinner was half over I came to the conclusion that my first impression was wrong, and that I had never met him before; yet, ever and again he reminded me of some one else. When he had consumed an enormous dessert, the Baron tore off the napkin with which he had surrounded his vast shirt-front, and announced his intention

of going with his daughter into the drawing-room.

"I must have some private fatherly talk with Elizabeth," he observed. "Do you in your English way drink your wine and smoke your tobacco before you join us? I insist on this. I shall take it ill if you do not."

So saying, his Majesty, with a magnificent bow, offered his arm to his daughter, and strode with imperial air from the room.

"Well, what do you think of the German Emperor?" asked Dick, laughing. "All there, isn't he?"

"Yes," I answered, "he seems to have a good opinion of himself. I hope you have?"

"In one way certainly," said Dick, passing the Burgundy. "He's behaved like a prince to us. Lizzie's his only daughter, and he hasn't forgotten the fact by any means. But I don't suppose he would have made such handsome settlements if my dear old uncle hadn't done likewise. This was one of the Baron's houses. He handed it over, lock, stock, and barrel, directly he knew that we were coming to Belgium, but he did so with the air of a potentate bestowing a fief on one of his retainers. I believe he's got houses all over the world; at all events, I

know of five establishments—one in Berlin, one in Paris, one in Manchester, one in St. Petersburg, and one in Zarnovia.”

“Where?” I asked.

“In Zarnovia. I daresay you’ve never heard of the place, but it’s the capital of Zarinthia.”

“Zarinthia!” I cried, “Zarinthia!”

“Yes,” said Dick coolly; “why this excitement? It’s a dead and alive principality in Eastern Europe, but the Baron was born there, and, I believe, thinks it one of the most heavenly countries in Christendom. There’s been a bit of a row there lately over the succession to the crown.”

“In what way?” I asked, curbing my feelings.

“Only that the people rose one fine day and kicked out the reigning Hospodar. He was a bit of a tartar, I fancy, literally and metaphorically. Then the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen wanted to take over the property of his kinsman as next heir, but the Zarinthians wouldn’t have him.”

“The Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen,” I repeated, “and why?”

“A most absurd reason. It appears that every Hospodar of Zarinthia must, on his coronation, wear the emerald belt of Loris

the Magnificent, which has been handed down for centuries from ruler to ruler. Xerxes, the Hospodar, who had to make tracks, had foolishly enough had the jewelled circlet turned into a necklace for his wife. When he disappeared, the belt went too. As the Grand Duke couldn't produce it, the Zarinthians wouldn't have him, and his marriage with Princess Mathilda of Trans-Caucasia, so the Baron says, was broken off in consequence. There's some story afloat of the emeralds having been stolen and sold in London. But, Lord bless me, Harry, there's nothing in all this to make the eyes start out of your head. Try one of these Cabinet Rothschilds."

I kept my presence of mind by a supreme effort, and, lighting a cigar, said indifferently, "And who governs Zarinthia now?"

"Oh! a Statthalter—a personage appointed *pro tem.* jointly by Germany and Austria. The Baron's very indignant on the subject, which, if you take my advice, you won't mention to him. He'll bombard you for two or three hours at a stretch with his views on this paltry affair. He's a red-hot supporter of the Grand Duke, I suppose because this claimant made him a Baron. But what possible interest can you and I



have in this matter? Let us turn to other better things."

"Is Mrs. Thorpe Baron Breckstein's only child?" I asked, merely to give my thoughts a little rest.

"She is, and she is not," replied Dick. "Stay, here's coffee. Wait a moment."

One of the trim serving maids deposited a tray, and silently vanished. When we had filled our cups, Dick resumed—

"When I say that Lizzie is, and is not, an only child, it's in this way. She has a brother, a perfect scoundrel, and yet one of the most agreeable fellows to be met anywhere. His father has paid his debts time after time, but finally he did something—even I don't know what it was—and the old man has disinherited Conrad, who is, I imagine, in America. I know that Lizzie has tried to get the Baron to forgive him, but the Kaiser is just as obstinate as a mule, and as unforgiving as a Corsican, when once his mind is made up. It would take a ton of persuasion to move him off his standpoint when his heart is set. I can't understand Conrad's conduct. I've not see him for years, but, as I say, he's a most charming companion, a man of the world, without a vestige of his father's nationality. Indeed, he might well

pass for an Englishman. A good-looking chap, too, in his way. Lizzie's got a coloured photo. of him somewhere. I'll show it you before you go. Now, my dear Harry, you look uneasy. I'm sure you've got something on your mind. I'll bet you a sovereign to a halfpenny I'm right. Can I help you? What is it? Woman or money?"

"Both, to a certain degree," I answered, "but, my dear Dick, before I tell you I must pull myself together. I'll look you up to-morrow, and then we'll have a quiet chat."

"By all means; I'm entirely at your disposal," said Dick cheerfully. "But remember this, old chap, with regard to finance, say the word and I'm there, in so far as I'm able, but when lovely woman comes on the scene, remember that I'm a married man."

"Precisely why I want your advice, and a thousand thanks for your good fellowship. I really don't——"

"Bosh!" interrupted Dick. "I don't forget how you jumped into the Thames after me at Windsor that morning, when that racing eight cut my skiff in two. So away with the dumps, and let us join the Kaiser and Lizzie. The potentate will want

us to make a quartet at whist. If you chance to cut him for a partner, for goodness sake don't comment on his mistakes. He thinks that he's Cavendish at six stone eight. If he upbraids you, take him easily."

So saying, he led the way to the drawing-room. Evidently the Baron was in rather an excited state, for we heard him exclaim in forcible tones, "He is, was, and ever will be a liar."

"Not me, I trust," said Dick, popping his head in at the door.

"Of course not," replied Mrs. Thorpe, with a faint attempt at a smile, "we were talking of some one——"

"Who need not be mentioned," broke in the Baron, with crushing dignity. "Let us to cards, to whist, to anything which may dispel the distraction of over-wrought human brain-work."

So to whist we sat down, playing franc points, and right glad I was that the Kaiser did not fall to me, but to his son-in-law, as a partner. I have seen many execrable players, but none to equal the Baron. I will allow that he never revoked, but he had a pernicious method of entirely disregarding his colleague's hand which, I am bound to say, Dick took without the least display of

temper. The Kaiser, moreover, held good cards, and had most extraordinary luck, and as he thumped down aces, kings, queens, and trumps, and picked up the tricks, he smiled benignly on the feeble efforts of Mrs. Thorpe and myself to oppose his triumphant progress. Probably with the weight of Dick's communication on my mind I was not up to my usual form, but the most adroit member of the Arlington or the Portland could not have withstood the Baron's good fortune. And the worst of it was that he would continually observe, "My beloved Elizabeth, you are reducing this game to a certainty. Von Moltke never laid his all-wise military plans with greater assurance than I do," or "Mr. Holdsworth, you fight like a Frenchman, but you have no reserves. I receive your attack, and then I sweep you from the field with my combined artillery and cavalry power." And despite his absurd metaphor he did, Dick all the while following the great man's moves with the dumb fidelity of a dog at the heel of his master. Yet when the game or the rubber was over, he would humbly entreat the Baron to explain why he had adopted such and such tactics? To which inquiry the Kaiser would answer with some arrogant hyperbole, and Dick,

the hypocrite, would accept it as an axiom worthy of being received as the gospel of an authority. When the Baron finally cried, "Hold! enough!" Mrs. Thorpe and I had lost sixty-three francs a-piece. She settled with her husband with a smile, I with the Kaiser in cash. He was in great good humour at his success, and observed, "My friend, you are full of ideas; that is to be perceived; but you must learn, and you must pay for learning. There may come a time when it shall be your privilege—as mine now—to teach." So saying, he pocketed my coins. Although annoyed, not at losing, but at his confounded patronage, I managed, thanks to a kick from Dick under the table, to restrain myself, and asked, "Where did you learn that excellent system of leading out all the aces in your hand, one after another?"

"In my native city," replied the Baron. "At the Casino-Verein of Zarnovia—a select association—a club, with the ever-to-be-respected stamp of liberal institution, with ancient foundation. That is where I learnt not only to play whist, but also to oppose myself to the encroachment of autocracy. In the year 1848——"

"I'm sure, father," interrupted Mrs.

Thorpe, "that your reminiscences of revolution won't interest Mr. Holdsworth in the least. You know that you were young and fiery, and so made cause against the Hospodar."

"And," said the Baron energetically, "where is the Hospodar now? Where is his High Mightiness? Does he inhabit the venerable palace of his ancestors, or does he, in company with his daughter, Princess Roumea, wander a fugitive on the face of the earth? Answer me that!"

"And answer me this, Baron," put in Dick, "are you ready for your hock and seltzer? Never mind the politics of Zarinthia. When you make Lizzie a present of the lost emeralds, I'll take more interest in the question."

"And who knows, young man," cried the Baron, "but that I might not be able to do so?"

He spoke in his loudest and most imperative voice, thumping his great, red right hand violently on the green baize. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he added in quite a different tone, "But I speak as a fool. Mr. Holdsworth, you must excuse my outburst of uncontrollable patriotism. It is, as you say, bred in the blood, and will out

on the tongue. But there is a time for all things, and I doubt not that my poor devil of a coachman has been for the last hour cursing his forgetful master for keeping himself and his horses waiting at the door."

So saying, he gulped down a tumbler of hock, and rang the bell violently. It was immediately answered by the female butler.

"My carriage!" said the Kaiser fiercely. "Is it here?"

"It waits for Monsieur le Baron," she replied demurely.

"Then get my overcoat," he snorted, "and give Jacob a glass of schnapps."

In less than five minutes the Kaiser was well wrapped up, had kissed his daughter, and less effusively Dick, and shaken hands with me, saying, "Good-night, Mr. Holdsworth; I am delighted to have met you. And believe me that I truly desire to see more of you, and that at the earliest opportunity. You will find me at Mengelle's, in the Rue Royale. Do me the honour to call, I beg of you, for I shall expect you." And the old gentleman absolutely squeezed my palm as we parted.

"I never saw the Kaiser so genial before," observed Dick, when his father-in-law had

left. "You seem to have gained his heart. I expect it is because he won all those points—and, great Christopher Columbus! how atrociously! I was watching your face when he whipped out that king of hearts, second hand, and was inwardly splitting with laughter. But go and see him, by all means. He's got enough irons in the fire to run over all the dirty linen in Europe, and might make you a director of half a dozen of the companies which he keeps like tame rabbits to breed more of the same species."

"My dear Dick, how you do let your imagination gallop," said Mrs. Thorpe.

"It wasn't given me to go in for walking or trotting matches. But, tell me, Lizzie, have you ever seen the Kaiser more beneficent at first sight than he has been to Harry Holdsworth? Why, you might have been his own son."

"Dick," said Mrs. Thorpe, with a flushed face, and in a reproachful way, "surely you forget."

"Of course I do, little woman," answered Dick contritely. "What a blundering ass I am." And he kissed his wife tenderly. "Forgive me. Now, Harry, you and I will have one game of billiards, one cigar, and



one drink before closing time. I know that Lizzie's longing to go to bed, but I'd like to show you how I've improved since we used to go to Bennett's together. We've got a first-rate English table, and there are not many residents in Brussels can say as much."

"Two games at the most, please, Mr. Holdsworth," said Mrs. Thorpe, laughing, as she bade me good-night. "And I hope you'll have more luck than you had at whist. If I wasn't so tired, I'd sit up and mark for you. Now, Dick, light my candle when you've shown Mr. Holdsworth into the billiard room.

"Candle first!" cried Dick. "The door next the *salon*, Harry. You can't mistake it. I'll be with you in a minute. Everything's ready. Pick your own cue. They're all the same. I don't believe in a man having his own particular stick in his own house."

The billiard room was equal in comfort to the other apartments. The table was one of Burroughes & Watts's best, and what I especially admired was an electric fire in the Dutch-tiled chimney corner. It threw no heat into the room, but imparted that air of cheerfulness which is often so wanting in

summer in a large apartment. Dick re-appeared very soon in a gorgeous silk smoking suit, much bedizened with braid and cord. We played three games, and I quite retrieved my reputation lost at whist, for I won each match, as Dick put it, "hands down."

"You've not forgotten your old form," he said, "and next time I'll take twenty in a hundred. You'd be about even with my brother-in-law. By the way, here's the likeness I spoke about."

He handed me a red leather case. I opened it, and having looked at the photograph enclosed, staggered back for support against the billiard table.

"Is this really your brother-in-law?" I asked hoarsely.

"Of course it is. Why, what's the matter, old chap? Feeling queer again?"

"Yes. I think I'd like to get out into the air. I'll go, if you don't mind," I answered. "I shall be better presently."

Dick was kindness itself—made me drink a stiff glass of brandy and water, and wanted to see me home. Of course I refused. How I managed finally to leave him I know not—without a definite idea—but somehow or other I did, with my brain more excited

than ever, for the portrait of his brother-in-law, Conrad Breckstein, was also that of Mr. Martin Baker, inventor of the "Capillasticon," the man who had robbed me of my precious charge on the journey from Waterloo Station to Southampton!

## CHAPTER XII.

### *A STRANGE ADVENTURE.*

I WAS quite bewildered with the revelation unwittingly made to me by Thorpe, and which way I went when I left his house I know not, so perturbed were my thoughts. However, it was between one and two in the morning when I found myself in front of the Cathedral of St. Gudule. The apparition of this stately edifice, standing out in all the weirdness of fantastic stone tracery, beneath the bright beams of a glorious moon, was so strikingly beautiful that I paused for a moment to note the effect made by the scudding clouds, which, ever and anon, veiled the heavenly light. The space before the Cathedral was absolutely empty, the flight of steps to the main entrance seemed chiselled in white marble, and the silence was profound. As I was preparing to mount the hill, the moon, which had for a few seconds been obscured, shone out full, and

then I noted a cloaked figure walking, or rather gliding, noiselessly in the shadow of the stairs. Evidently this stealthy and belated person was hurrying to his home, but his cat-like and echoless method of progression in no way disturbed the peaceful nocturne. Suddenly he stopped and drew himself into an angle of the wall, becoming absolutely imperceptible in the blackness of the retreat. The movement was so quickly executed, and evidently with a set purpose, that I resolved to wait and watch for some explanation. But I argued with myself, "if I proceed up the hill, this mysterious stranger will suspect my purpose," so, perceiving a buttress commanding the unknown's position, and so thoroughly hidden by the left tower that he could not possibly see me, I crept behind it. The chimes rang out a quarter to two, and nothing broke the silence but the distant tramp of a *sergent-de-ville*; the moon still continued to play bo-peep with the earth, and the few street lamps blinked with their feeble yellow eyes. I began to think that my curiosity had outbalanced my common sense. What right had I, Harry Holdsworth, to be keeping my weary body out of its lawful resting-place in order to gratify a morbid desire to pry into

some one else's affairs, when my own were in such a precarious condition? The thing was preposterous. I was not a detective, a private enquiry agent, or a seeker after romance. Clearly I was making a fool of myself. Nevertheless, I resolved to keep watch till I had finished the pipe which I was smoking. Half-a-dozen more whiffs would probably give a definite ending to an indefinite problem. Two o'clock clanged forth above my head, and scarcely had the sound died away when I heard some one approaching from my right, and a minute afterwards a man passed close beside me, walking briskly up the incline. I could not see his features, for the moon had again disappeared, but he was certainly over six feet in height, and was clad in a light suit and a broad-brimmed hat. He did not notice my presence, but went on rapidly towards the nook where the mysterious being had concealed himself. As he reached the spot the moon flashed out again. I saw the quick walker go on unheedingly, and then the cloaked figure rushed from his ambush; there was a flash of steel, followed by a piteous cry, and the tall pedestrian fell forward on the pavement. Horror-struck, I ran to his assistance. His assailant was

bending over the prostrate man, but, hearing my footsteps, he turned round, gave one glance, and then with noiseless rapidity crossed the road, and disappeared down a street on the opposite side of the way. I did not attempt to follow him. My first thought was for the stricken man, who was groaning terribly. I tried to raise him on his feet, but he was heavy, and I could only lift him a few inches from the ground. I spoke to him in French, but he made no reply. Then, by the light of some wax matches I endeavoured to find the wound, and presently I discovered blood trickling slowly through his coat from a rent just below the left shoulder. I suppose that I ought to have called for assistance, but it flashed across me that if I did so, I should be implicated in a very serious affair, and probably be accused of attempted murder. Still, the stream must be staunched, for every second the gruesome patch on his grey garment grew larger and larger. One thing was certain—to do so I must get at the wound itself. But how? Then I had an inspiration. My knife contained a pair of small scissors, and with these I slit his coat, waistcoat, and shirt up the back. He had no cinglet or vest, and with the aid of the moon and more matches

I soon came upon the cause of evil, a puncture evidently made by some thin and pointed weapon. It seemed to be formed in an oblique direction, due, as I afterwards learnt, to the dagger striking off a leathern brace crossing the shoulder. The blood was flowing less rapidly than I expected, but how to stop it? Again I had an inspiration. Round my waist I had always, in fulfilment of a sacred promise made to a dear and departed relative, worn a flannel band known as a cholera belt. This I whipped off, cut it into squares, and as well as I was able formed a thick pad, which I bound over the wound with a silk handkerchief. The poor fellow seemed eased almost immediately, and his groaning ceased entirely. I need scarcely say that the time occupied by this operation seemed to me a century. By an almost superhuman effort I managed to turn him on to his right side, but he did not open his eyes. I now saw that he was about sixty years of age, clean shaven, with the exception of a heavy grey moustache; his features were clear cut, and his nose long and aquiline. Again I spoke to him, but he made no reply. By what means could I break this fearful spell? I had no flask, and was just about to try blowing some tobacco



smoke up his distended nostrils when I thought that I would first search his pockets, in case he might possess a restorative. I found some papers, a small revolver, a handkerchief, a penknife, some gold and silver coins, an enamelled medallion, and a little bottle, tightly corked, containing a white powder. I withdrew the stopper and smelt it, when I was greeted with a pungent odour which for the moment nearly choked me, and then wakened every corner of my brain with its stinging, subtle essence. I thought I heard a *sergent-de-ville* approaching. In despair I poured out a larger pinch of the powder, and thrust it up the wounded man's nose. The effect was magical. He muttered some exclamations in an unknown tongue, gave two or three convulsive shudders, which I feared would disarrange my bandage, sighed deeply, and then slowly lifted himself into a sitting position and opened his large dark eyes, which he fixed menacingly on me. Again he muttered something which I did not understand, but took to be a question, so I said in French, "Some villain has attempted to assassinate you."

"Evidently," he replied, with a terrible look.

"If you do not mind being left alone," I said, "I will go in search of the police."

"To hell with the police," he growled, and then added eagerly, "You are an Englishman?"

"Yes," I answered, "and I——"

"Enough!" he broke in, "I will trust you. Give me some more of that powder," he continued, pointing to the bottle.

I did so. He took a copious sniff, and appeared to be greatly relieved.

"How did you know of its virtue?" he asked suspiciously.

I replied that I had used it in sheer desperation. He seemed satisfied, and attempted to get on his legs, but the effort was too great, and he sank back on the flagstones.

"Heavens! what a weight I am," he growled. "You must give me your help, and I will endeavour to stand on my feet."

I placed myself under his right arm, and with a mighty effort, which, judging by the drops of sweat rolling off his face, caused him exquisite pain, he managed to rear himself against the Cathedral wall, and a curious being he looked, with his clothes hanging about his shoulders in tatters. But the look

on his face was one of mingled agony and determination.

"Shall I not get some assistance?" I asked.

"No!" he answered fiercely. "With your aid I can walk—slowly. I live hard by. We must cross the street, and take the second turning on the right. Then leave the rest to me. If I should fall, be good enough to revive me with the white snuff. But I do not mean to, if I can help it. That I promise you. Now, gently and slowly."

As we moved forward at a snail's pace, he gave vent to a long guttural exclamation, which may have been a prayer, but sounded uncommonly like a string of fervid imprecations. But it was Greek to me. Our progress was indeed slow, but the grip with which my companion held me was anything but gentle, and his strong, bony fingers seemed to set into my flesh. Every few yards he would pause, and once or twice I thought he was going to fall, but evidently he was of immense muscular strength, and he would not have recourse to the powder, though I pressed him to do so.

"No," he said stubbornly, "that is for the head, not the body." And he plodded on unflinchingly.

I thought that our journey would never come to an end; but finally, after many turnings, we halted in front of a white house, with green jalousies to the top windows, while those on the ground floor were protected, as is common in Belgian houses, with stout iron bars. The door was of very dark wood, but without a knocker, nor could I see a bell-pull.

“Is this your abode?” I asked my companion.

“Yes,” he answered. “I suppose I must trust you.” And, apparently collecting his strength, he pressed heavily, not upon the door itself, but on one of the great pillars which stood on either side of the entrance. To my immense astonishment, it immediately swung inwards, leaving an aperture through which two men could easily pass abreast.

“Enter!” said the wounded man; and as we did so the pillar slowly revolved, and I found myself in a dimly lighted hall of vast size and great height, at the further end of which I could see a richly carved staircase.

“I dare not try and walk on the parquet without more help,” said my companion hoarsely. “Go straight forward till you come to a night-light on a table at the foot of the staircase. By the side of the lamp

is a whistle attached to a tube. Blow it. I must ask you ——”

But here he staggered and would have fallen, but that I supported him to a large arm-chair, something like one used by porters, into which he sank, no doubt, insensible, for when I spoke to him he did not reply, but began to utter the stertorous groanings which he had made when I found him after he was stabbed. Here was indeed a perplexing situation. At first I was about to use the powder, but on second thoughts I resolved to follow his instructions, and stepped lightly forward over the slippery waxed boards to the light, which was faintly twinkling in front of me. I found the call, and not without some qualms softly blew it. The effect was magical. In an instant the hall was made bright as day by some unseen agency, and almost at the same time a very tall, fierce-looking man, in some sort of rich outlandish uniform, followed by two others in the same garb, but of simpler fashion, approached me from a side-door. I had not long to speculate on their appearance, for the tall man immediately gripped me by the throat, and threw me on the floor with a twist of his right leg. At the same time the other two men knelt down and held me on my

back. The giant put some questions to me in a language which I did not understand, and as, indeed, I told him in French, of which neither he nor they had evidently any knowledge. The big ruffian seemed perplexed, and I was explaining matters to him in English in a loud tone of voice, for I hoped that the wounded man would thereby be aroused from his stupor, when, at the top of the staircase, appeared the most beautiful vision which I have ever seen. It was that of a young girl dressed in some sort of embroidered white satin dressing-gown; her long golden hair streamed over her shoulders, her blue eyes were enlarged with amazement, not fright, and her nude feet had evidently been hastily thrust into a pair of embroidered slippers. She carried a long silver candlestick in one hand and a revolver in the other. Despite my unpleasant predicament I had time to notice these things, because, in a loud and imperious voice, she addressed some question to my captors in the strange tongue aforesaid. On hearing their answer she came down swiftly into the hall, and, bending over me, exclaimed in French—

“Who are you? What do you want here?”

"I am an Englishman," I replied resentfully, feeling deeply the indignity of my position, "who, because he has done a stranger a service, has been brutally assaulted by these rascals."

"An Englishman!" she cried in (thank heaven!) English. "But how did you get in?"

"You had better ask the wounded gentleman by the entrance door," I answered.

She did not wait for more, but, in some hurried words, no doubt told my guards to follow her and bring me with them, and glided rather than rushed towards the seat whence the groaning still continued. I can see her now with her long tresses streaming behind her—how silk-like must have been their texture—and her wide sleeves making wings to her snowy raiment. Somewhere I had seen a picture of an angel hastening to relieve distress, painted by an Italian artist, whose name I had forgotten; but the apparition of this unknown lady brought it back to me with a vividness which may perhaps appear unreasonable under the circumstances. Yet I have often found that unexpected memory makes harmony with the actuality of present fact. The young lady, on perceiving the condition of

the unfortunate sufferer, gave a stifled sob, but exhibited none of the feminine extravagances usual on such occasions. Turning quickly to me, she said—

“What does this mean?”

I told her as briefly as I was able what had occurred. She gave some directions to the first ruffian, who immediately, in so far as I could understand by his gestures, bade his minions release me, and then disappeared.

“I owe you deep gratitude,” she said to me, “for this is my father. I need not say that I ask your pardon for the barbarous way in which you have been treated.”

“Of course it was a natural mistake,” I mumbled, “but don’t you think that it would be well to try that powder again.”

“No,” she answered, “I shall have the best advice in a minute.”

Almost as she spoke, an elderly gentleman, who had most certainly been roused from his bed, came striding along the hall, buttoning up his frock-coat and vest as he proceeded. Within ten feet of our group he halted, knocked his heels together with a clink, and made some remarks in the, to me, unknown tongue.

“Quick, quick, Doctor!” said the lady



in French, "never mind etiquette, but attend to His Royal Highness. This good Samaritan will give you the details of this atrocity. Ah! the villains! the villains!"

Again I repeated my story to the Doctor, a white-bearded personage, who listened attentively. When I finished he grasped me by the hand, and then, with great deliberation, proceeded to examine the unfortunate victim. As he did so, I noticed for the first time an expression of anxious anguish on the lady's face, though it was evident she was trying to restrain all emotion. Tenderly and skilfully, with the assistance of the man whom I still mentally called the first ruffian, did the Doctor pursue his inquiry into the case of the handsome sufferer, who still groaned piteously. At last it was finished, and the physician said—

"Thanks to the person who tended His Highness, he will with care recover. Let him be taken to his apartment."

"Oh, sir!" cried the Princess (for such I began to suppose must be her rank) as the two minor ruffians bore off the wounded man very slowly, "how can we ever be sufficiently grateful to you."

"Stay, madam," said the Doctor, "we have first to prove his story. It must be

confirmed by my illustrious patient. I cannot expect him to speak till to-morrow morning about mid-day."

"And in the meantime?" asked the lady.

"He must stay here, madam," said the Doctor, "no doubt we can find him lodging."

Thereupon he gave some directions to the first ruffian. I protested vehemently against this infringement of the rights of man; I implored the Princess to allow me to depart; I pointed out my evening costume; I swore to invoke the aid of the British Minister—but all to no purpose. I had only one crumb of comfort. The Princess said, "Sir, *I* believe your story or I should not have spoken as I have done, but the Doctor is right. I must beg of you to accept our hospitality for the remainder of the night."

So saying, with a graceful bow, she followed her father. The Doctor stopped to say, "You shall not be uncomfortable. You shall have whiskey and soda water. All Englishmen love whiskey and soda water. I wish you pleasant dreams."

I did not answer him, for the first ruffian tapped me on the shoulder, and I began to think that my Marlborough Street experience was about to be repeated. He pointed the way; I followed him through a side-door.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *IN DURANCE VILE.*

I WAS taken by the first ruffian along a broad passage very comfortably carpeted, and lighted by many gasaliers with shades coloured of a soft green hue. I could see that there were many pictures on the walls between the doorways—I should say about a dozen on either side of the corridor—which were covered with green plush *portières*. At the very end of the passage the first ruffian ushered me into a very cheery-looking bedroom. The Doctor was true to his word, for, as we entered, the second ruffian appeared with a tray on which were spirits, wines, mineral waters, a box of cigars, and also several newspapers and books; evidently my captors did not wish to treat me badly. The first ruffian pointed to a cosy easy-chair, and indicated with a very polite bow that I should seat myself. At the same time he pointed to the bottles, and by gesture invited me to

choose a beverage, and in a few minutes I found myself lounging in an arm-chair with a brandy and soda at my elbow, and the evening edition of the *Indépendance Belge* in my hand. He then touched my clothes and the bed, and indicated by pantomime that he would fetch me some sleeping apparel. Then, with another polite bow he retired, followed by the second ruffian. As he left the room I heard the key turn in the lock, and I knew that my captivity was only too real. When I was left alone I made, after trying the door, an inspection of my "cell." It was a large apartment with a dressing- and bath-room attached, and there were four windows in all, but each one was closely guarded with a strong *grille* of iron bars and apparently gave into a small side street, for I could see no lights, though I felt sure that I must be on the ground floor of the house. I next examined the bed, certain stories of travellers being let down into cellars or crushed by descending canopies rushing into my perturbed brain. But the couch, with its light brass work and exquisite linen covered by a white-and-gold striped silken rug, looked innocent enough for the most timorous maiden in

creation. The furniture of finely-carved white wood was equally light and pleasant, and the white-tiled open grate, in which a beech-wood fire was burning, did not suggest any criminal descent down the chimney. I saw that there was nothing to do but resign myself to fate, so, kicking off my shoes, I picked out a cigar and sank into the arm-chair to reflect upon my curious position. Mr. Bodkin, J. J., Mr. and Mrs. Dick Thorpe, the "German Emperor," and the discovery with regard to Dick's brother-in-law were all mixed together like mincemeat in my mind with the catastrophe under the Cathedral, the beautiful apparition in the hall, Mr. Barbican's and, above all, Hetty's disappearance. I seemed to be playing in a harlequinade without rhyme or reason. I helped myself to another drink, and as I did so I heard the door behind me open. I started up, and was confronted by the very last person whom I should have expected to see—Kritz, the mute, with a decided grin on his face and a bundle of garments in his arms. He stood enjoying my astonishment for a few moments, and then proceeded in the most matter-of-fact way to arrange the bed, on which he placed a silken night-robe and an Indian dressing-

gown. At the same time he offered me a pair of velvet slippers. He then wrote on his tablet and handed it to me. I read—  
“Is there anything else that Monsieur desires? In the morning I will bring Monsieur a change of clothes.”

“Good God, Kritz!” I exclaimed, “where am I?”

He shook his head, smiled, and wrote on the slate—

“In good hands. Do not be alarmed.”

I was so angered at his answer that I dashed the tablet to the floor and picked up a chair, with a threatening oath. Kritz did not so much as move an eyelid. He picked up the slate, and wrote on it—

“Please be calm. I speak for your welfare. There are men in this house capable of anything.”

“Is my life in danger?” I cried fiercely; “if so, I will sell it dearly.”

He shook his head with a deprecatory smile, and again wrote on it—

“I have good news. I have found the lady.”

“Miss Cameron?” I cried joyously.

He nodded, with a pleased expression.

“Where is she?” I exclaimed, bewildered by his information. Again he wrote—

"I may not tell you now. To-morrow you shall know all. Will Monsieur kindly disrobe, as I must take away his clothes?"

I hesitated for an instant, and then, seeing my utter helplessness, without saying another word, I began taking off my coat and waistcoat. Kritz played the part of valet with noiseless assiduity, and in less time than I can say I was arrayed in the night garments, and had the velvet slippers on my feet. Kritz picked up my evening suit and overcoat, and, bowing in a way which would not have disgraced the first ruffian, was about to leave me, when I said—

"I see that I am helpless, but answer me two questions. First, does Mr. Jackson know where I am?"

Kritz shook his head.

"Secondly," I asked, "has Mr. Beddoes returned?"

Again he shook his head.

"You swear that you are not deceiving me about Miss Cameron?" I said eagerly.

Kritz for the third time shook his head, placed his disengaged hand on his heart, bowed, and glided from the room. I heard the key click once more in the lock.

If my senses had been in a whirl before,

they were now going round like a maelstrom. But, unless Kritz was telling a deliberate lie, one glorious fact remained—he had found my sweetheart. But when should I see her? How would the mute's discovery help my plans so long as Mr. Barbican maintained his obdurate and inimical attitude? What was I to do, a prisoner without any of his own garments to his back, a prisoner in a palace, arrayed in the costly vestments of a personage, whose name I did not even know? I paced the room, quivering with excitement and rage, utterly unable to solve the queries which I had put to myself. There are times when a man is so bewildered by the force of circumstances that he cannot collect his wits, or argue out the "pros" and "cons" of release from a terrible misadventure with any degree of common sense. I might try to bribe Kritz, but on looking at the contents of my pockets lying on the dressing-table, I saw that my available ready money amounted to less than a hundred and fifty francs. I might try and communicate with Dick Thorpe, but I was absolutely ignorant of the name of the street in which my place of durance vile was situated. Nevertheless, I might manage to throw a note out of the window, and beg



some passer-by to take an enclosed letter to my friend, by whom he should be rewarded for his services. There were writing materials on a *tabouret*. I would try this, anyhow. But would the windows open? I got up and tried them. They all opened easily, and the fresh, cool air which rushed in cooled my fevered brow. A letter would easily pass through the *grille*, which I shook with impotent fury. It was dark as Erebus outside, and I was more than ever convinced that the windows gave on to a side street, a *ruelle*, perhaps an *impasse*. Nevertheless, I would risk it. I sat down to write, but I had not penned two lines when an idea suggested itself to me, viz., to try and find out how far the pavement was below the casement. I still thought that my prison was on the ground floor. It occurred to me to lower a lighted wax candle—there were eight or ten on the mantelpiece—through the *grille*, and so determine my bearings. But how to lower my pioneer? I had no string or rope. Suddenly I perceived that the damask curtains of the windows had thick silken cords attached. I ruthlessly pulled one down and unravelled it, and in ten minutes I had a cord as long as a boy's fishing line. I bound the candle round with some of the

wire off the soda water bottles, attached the cord and lighted my explorer. I thought, allowing for any possible slope of the hill going towards the lower town, that a few feet would solve the enigma. To my great surprise the line ran out to its extremity without finding bottom. I hauled in the candle, sacrificed another curtain cord, and let down my messenger again with caution. It descended fairly and steadily. Then I heard the faint sound of a fizz, and the line trembled as though I had caught a fish. I could not, owing to the *grille*, see what had happened; but I thought it possible that some one below had gripped the candle, the more so as it appeared to be carried away from the window with considerable speed. I pulled it in as quickly as I could. There was but slight resistance, but when I had the candle in my hands again it was dripping with water. The horrible truth flashed across me, and I resolved to test my conviction. I looked about for something heavy enough and yet small enough to pass through the bars. The poker was the very article needed. It was a long and solid piece of steel. I thrust it through the *grille* with impetus and listened intently. In a few seconds I heard a loud splash, and then

I knew to my dismay that my surmise was correct. The space below the windows was no side street or even court. It was a stream, probably an open drain, of running water. My scheme for communicating with Dick Thorpe or any one else in the outer world was knocked on the head. My prison chamber had only been too well chosen. For a moment I was tempted to dash my head against the *grille*, and then I remembered Hetty, and with Hetty came hope. I threw myself on the bed, and, like the blundering ass that I felt myself to be, could think of no alleviation to my anxiety but to pray for the day. And while I prayed for the dawn, the darkness fell upon me, and I, weary in mind and body, sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

It must have been late in the morning when I awoke with a sudden start and a wild cry. I sat up in bed and looked round. The candles were burnt out, and, although the light was not bright, I knew that the day was well advanced. I got up and rushed to the window. Opposite to me was a great blank wall; below, by straining my eyes, I could just see the rushing turbid stream in which I had made my experiment with the candle. I concluded

that, while I slept, Kritz must have entered the apartment, for a suit of my everyday clothes was laid out on the table, together with clean linen socks and walking-boots. The fire had been relighted, and, on going into the dressing-room and turning on the taps of the bath, I found that, as advertised with regard to suburban villas, hot and cold water was laid on. Brushes, combs, and toilette articles were laid out on the dressing-table, and by the fire smoked a kind of Russian samovar, accompanied by a cup and saucer, a sugar basin, a jug of cream, rolls, butter, and marmalade. On turning the tap of the samovar over the cup, a flow of deliciously-smelling coffee flowed into it. Evidently my captors meant to do well by me, and my spirits revived after my bath and a light breakfast. I concluded that the best thing that I could do was to shake off my silken robes and dress myself, and as I did so I made sure that Kritz had been himself to the Rue de Namur, for nobody else could have selected the articles which I needed. I also felt sure that the mute would have acquainted J. J. with my detention, and my spirits rose at the thought, for my immediate release seemed certain. But any attempt to unravel the mystery of my

imprisonment was futile. All I could hope was that Kritz had not lied to me with regard to Hetty. He had promised that I should know where she was, but, after all, the word of this irresponsible boy was utterly unsupported by any reasonable evidence. I was debating all sorts of theories, when there came a smart knock at my door, followed, without waiting for my response, by the entrance of the elderly gentleman, who was known to me only as the Doctor.

“Good-morning, Mr. Hamilton,” he said affably. “I trust that you have slept well?”

“Yes, thank you,” I replied. “Your prison is quite a model of comfort.”

“Fie! fie,” he said, sitting down. “What an odious word to use—a prison. Dear me, when I hear you say prison, all sorts of terrible eventualities arise. An ultimatum by the British Minister to the Court of King Leopold, the bombardment of Ostend, the payment of a huge compensation by the Belgian Government. Follies, my dear sir, follies! Try one of the cigarettes. They are the purest Zarinthian tobacco.”

“Zarinthian tobacco!” I echoed, starting up. That cursed Zarinthia seemed to crop up wherever I went.

“Yes, Zarinthian tobacco,” repeated the

Doctor. "It is less stringent than Turkish, more invigorating than Egyptian. In fact, when discussing Zarinthian affairs there is nothing more soothing than Zarinthian tobacco."

"But," I cried, feeling very uncomfortable, "we are not discussing Zarinthian affairs."

"Not for the moment," he said with a smile, "but we shall if you will."

"I know nothing of Zarinthia," I broke in. "I wish that the cursed country was at the bottom of the sea."

"Impossible, my dear sir," he said sweetly, "from its geological formation. I will pass the adjective 'cursed,' for it is singularly appropriate at the present time, Mr. Hamilton—shall we say Hamilton, by the way?"

"Why not?" I answered with increasing uneasiness, "since it is my name, though how you come to know, I am at a loss to determine."

The Doctor eyed me for a moment with a twinkle in his eye, and then said, "Just now I spoke jestingly of an ultimatum by the British Envoy in consequence of a supposed outrage committed on an Englishman in Brussels. Well, I believe that I was the principal factor in obliging you to

become our guest last night; therefore I should become the principal defendant in your *acte d'accusation*."

"I don't even know your name," I observed sulkily.

"My name is Baron Otto von Spielnitz, Hof-rath and doctor of medicine. I can prove this fact to the British Envoy, for I hold the highest credentials. But in your case—would not His Excellency, the representative of the great and good Queen Victoria, want proof as to the identity of the plaintiff? There are many names beginning with the letter 'H,' Hamilton, of course, and shall we say Holdsworth?"

"The devil!" I cried, leaping up from my chair, fairly frightened by this imperturbable casuist.

"I did not say so," he said with a chuckle. "But a truce to jesting," he added, with a hard look. "I know you, Mr. Holdsworth. You are the messenger sent by Mr. Barbican, jeweller, of London, to carry the famous emeralds of Zarinthia to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen at Cowes, when you were robbed of them under most extraordinary circumstances. You are the Mr. Holdsworth who was subsequently visited by the Grand

Duke himself, disguised, at your chambers in London, and you are the Mr. Holdsworth who, visiting Belgium under an assumed name, dined last night in company with the Baron Breckstein at the house of his son-in-law, 99 Rue des Martyres."

He poured all these shots into me like an ironclad annihilating a wooden ship with quick-firing guns, and paused to see what effect he had produced. Staggered as I was by the accuracy of his information, I felt a stubborn resentment at the way in which he had, for some unknown object, attempted to overwhelm me.

"I conclude," I said, "that you are a detective—if so, I congratulate you on your discernment. I am Henry Holdsworth, and you have stated the facts correctly. Now, what do you want?"

"To know," he replied suavely, "why you are in Belgium, and dined last night with Baron Breckstein?"

"Then," I replied hotly, "Baron whatever your name is, I'll see you damned first."

He seemed quite disconcerted by my reply, and murmuring, "Ah! these hot-headed English," lighted a fresh cigarette.

I pursued my advantage. "Look here," I said, "you can only have told me by a



system of spying. What have my movements to do with you, a perfect stranger? Why am I kept against my will in this house, because I assisted another stranger, who was being assassinated? Answer me as man to man."

"I will," he answered quietly. "It is because a great lady takes an interest in your welfare, or, rather, in that of some one very dear to you."

"Miss Cameron?" I exclaimed unwittingly.

"Yes! she is the friend of the great lady," he answered, with a twinkle in his eyes, "and she needs your assistance."

"For what?" I asked, thunderstruck.

"To recover the lost emeralds of Zarinthia," he said earnestly. "You can do so, and you shall, by heaven!" he added fiercely.

"And who are you, who dare to spy on me and then command me?"

"I am," he answered rising, "the Head of the Household of His Royal Highness the Hospodar of Zarinthia, whom God preserve as He did last night. Follow me into my august master's presence."

I went out of the room after him, feeling more bewildered than ever.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *IN THE PRESENCE OF THE HOSPODAR AND THE PRINCESS.*

BARON VON SPIELNITZ led the way down the corridor and across the main hall to a door opening out of the vast apartment in which I had been arrested by the first and second ruffians. I followed like a prisoner who, with a string round his neck, knows that the cord will be pulled unpleasantly tight if he does not keep pace with his conductor. We then ascended a staircase, after passing through an ante-room in which half-a-dozen scowling, bewhiskered, and bemoustached men in picturesque costumes, displaying cartridge belts, pistols, and poniards all over their bodies, saluted the Baron and myself with such nonchalant deference as I have seen Montenegrin mountaineers display to their superiors. I mean that these *boyards*, or whatever they called themselves, would undoubtedly have, at the

word of command from their master, knocked the heads of the Hofrath and myself together without any sort of compunction. After a moment's halt we entered a large bed-chamber, magnificently furnished. On a velvet-covered couch lay the form of the personage whom I had befriended on the previous night. Unless Baron von Spielnitz was an unconscionable liar, he was none other than the Hospodar of Zarinthia. By his side was seated the lovely lady who had greeted him with such tender concern on our arrival, and who was, I felt convinced, none other than his daughter, "the great lady" who took an interest in Hetty Cameron and myself. When I looked upon the scene, I felt utterly unable to realise that I was engaged in a nineteenth century adventure. I seemed suddenly to have been called back to the middle ages as I gazed upon the stricken regal warrior and the wondrous beauty of the lady. I suppose that a courtier or diplomatist would have sunk upon his knees or touched the carpet with his forehead, but please remember that I was only a jeweller's assistant, glib enough with ordinary mortals even of the higher class, but absolutely unaccustomed to deal with Hospodars. So I felt like a fool, and

must certainly have looked like one, as I stood mumchance.

The Hospodar broke silence, and, beckoning me to approach his couch, said in a kindly tone—

“Sir, I believe that I owe my life to you. In what way can I repay you?”

I mumbled something about “it doesn’t matter, and I hope you are getting on all right, sir, your Royal Highness, your Majesty.”

The Princess seeing my confusion, came to my assistance, and with a sweet smile spoke.

“We owe you a deep debt of gratitude, Mr. Holdsworth—you see I know your name—and we will never forget it. Thank God, that my dear father is not now in danger of his life! Last night he was betrayed.”

“And I will have vengeance, bitter vengeance,” broke in the Hospodar fiercely, with a leonine shake of his head, which made him groan with pain.

“Softly, father,” said the Princess, smoothing his pillow; “our revenge will be all the sweeter if we make it sure. You have asked Mr. Holdsworth in what way you can repay him. I answer for him, by increasing your debt.”

And she bent upon me the full lustre of her sapphire eyes.

"Is that not so, Mr. Holdsworth?" she added, with a smile.

I stammered an affirmative.

Here the Baron, with a low bow, observed, "I have acquainted the gentleman with your Royal Highness's command."

"Say desire," interrupted the Princess; "and my desire is that you, sir, should recover the lost emeralds of our House."

The Princess's words set fire to the dynamite of my own heart.

"By Christ! who died for us," I cried, forgetful of all etiquette, "to recover the emeralds I would be the impenitent thief on the Cross!"

"Nay, Mr. Holdsworth," said the lady sweetly; "we would have you help us to catch him."

"And I will, madam, if I can," I said earnestly. "But how? but how?"

"I think that we can show you the way. But remember that, succeed or fail, your zeal in our interests will only increase our indebtedness to you."

The Hospodar magnificently bowed his head, no doubt forgetful of his wound, and as a result groaned in agony and closed his eyes.

The Princess leapt to her feet.

"Herr Baron," she exclaimed, "as time is precious, I will leave my dear father to your ever-constant care ; and," she added, turning to me, "I will ask you, sir, to accompany me to my withdrawing-room, where we can talk privately."

I thought that Baron von Spielnitz did not look overjoyed at this arrangement, but he hastened to attend to the Hospodar, while, still led like a criminal, I was conducted by the Princess to an adjoining chamber, entirely furnished with light blue decorations. I suppose that some sort of sense of her own charms may have suggested the tints to Her Royal Highness, but, surrounded by the delicate azure, her golden locks and fair complexion seemed more angelic than ever. I can thoroughly recommend this pale blue symphony to blonde beauties, but let them choose, as had evidently the Princess of Zarinthia, the exact hue. There are light blues and light blues. There is the vulgar light blue worn by the shop boys who support Cambridge oarsmen on the day of the University boat race, and there is the exquisite hedge-sparrow light blue, which is worn by the Eton boys when they, in conjunction with

the Harrow youths, generously give an annual benefit at Lord's to the Marylebone Cricket Club. The Princess's chamber was of the Eton hue. She motioned me to a seat. Somehow I felt much more composed than when I was cross-examined by Baron Spielnitz. The Princess was evidently a woman of business, for she plunged into the business before us with the agility and readiness of one of those divers whom most of us have seen at the Westminster Aquarium. My similes are not intentionally vulgar, but I cannot pretend to be refined.

"Now, Mr. Holdsworth," she began, "I said just now that we were in your debt. So we are, and ready to make quittance with you. But you are also in mine. Let me be frank with you. As I understand, Baron von Spielnitz has told you that your conduct during the last few months has been open to grave suspicion. You have been drugged in a railway train, hailed at a police court, disowned by your employer, placed under the surveillance of detectives, and deserted by your lady love."

"No," I cried "never deserted by her."

The Princess smiled and said, "Forgive me, Mr. Holdsworth, I put that to try you. You are right, you have never been

deserted by Hetty Cameron ; she is your best friend."

"Thank God!" I ejaculated fervently. "But what do you wish me to do?"

"I am coming to that," she went on, placidly running her long, white fingers through her golden hair, "I said just now that you were in my debt. I will prove it. But for me," and she smiled most enchantingly, "I am afraid that Mr. Henry Holdsworth would not—well, be sitting now in my boudoir."

"Good heavens, madam," I said nervously, "what do you mean?"

She looked at me as I believe the late Mr. Gladstone was wont to look upon impertinent questioners in the House of Commons—that is to say, with a sort of corkscrew-brad-awlgimlet glance, which went through to the brain ; not that I believe the Princess and the Grand Old Mastodon were the least alike in character, but they both undoubtedly possessed extracting eyes. She said, after a pause, "You ask what I mean? Well, I will tell you. You put a question to me. I answer with the worst kind of rhetoric. I put a question to you"; she paused again, and then said, "Would you know the lost emeralds of Zarinthia if you saw them?"



"On my life I would," I answered, enthusiastically.

The Princess rose and went to an escritoire, which she unlocked. I watched her movements with feverish excitement. She produced a case and opened it. There, flashing before me in a ray of sunshine, which crept in through the window, were the stolen gems just as I had received them from Mr. Barbican's hands.

"O madam!" I cried, "I will swear to the jewels anywhere. They are perfect as when I was given them to take to Cowes."

"Examine them carefully," she said, coldly.

Tremblingly I did so. The gems were none other than those of which I had been robbed in the Southampton train.

"Madam," I faltered, "I am convinced. These are the emeralds of Zarinthia."

"So am I convinced," she observed angrily, shutting and opening the case, "of your innocence. These are no more the emeralds of Zarinthia than the cat's-eyes in this bracelet which I wear."

"But, your Royal Highness," I began, when she stopped me with an imperious gesture.

"Stop!" she said. "There have been dupes all round. There is one stone missing

from the girdle of Zarinthia. This necklace is perfect. Here is the first lost gem. Take this microscope and see how it is marked on the right hand corner of the eighth facet."

With the awakened dulness of an injured man I did so. Small but sure were the Greek letters "Φ Δ."

"You see the characters?" asked the Princess, as I put down the microscope.

"Yes," I answered faintly.

"They mean 'Love—God'" she said; "but here, take this rubbish," she added, opening the case and throwing the necklace on the floor, "put it under the microscope, and find on one sham emerald there a similar mark."

I did so, and I could not.

"No," I said, "they bear no such letters."

"Because," observed her Royal Highness, "they are forgeries. This string of false emeralds of which you were robbed in the train is not a bad imitation, but they forgot the marks. It is cleverly copied, but a sham, a deceit, a fraud, and a gigantic attempt to upset an hereditary legislature. You understand me, Mr. Holdsworth, this swindle is not like the attempt of rogues to defraud a bank or to cheat at cards. It is a con-

spiracy to prevent a ruler by divine right to sit upon the throne of his ancestors. The real emeralds of Zarinthia are precious in the eyes of the Zarinthians, and these miserable frauds would never be received in their place."

The Princess, with her eyes flashing, stamped upon the floor in her excitement, but in the next minute she had calmed down to the dead level of commonplace courtesy.

"Now, Mr. Holdsworth," she said, "having what you English would call blown off the steam—or, pardon me, should I not say Americans?—let me tell you what I wish you to do. There is a small town on the Meuse, near the frontier, called Dinant. In former days, when vainglorious personages such as Louis Quatorze and Louis Quinze and Marshal Saxe and the Duke of Marlborough and others were wasting the lives and the money of their countries for the better part of a century, Dinant was probably an important place, but nowadays it is picturesque, sleepy, and old-fashioned. Nevertheless, Mr. Holdsworth, it is there that you will find our lost regalia. Ah! you start! You have an inkling that I am speaking the truth?"

"On my honour, madam," I said, "the

reason of my surprise is because I know that Mr. Barbican, my late employer, has gone to that district."

She laughed scornfully and then explained. "And you are surprised that Mr. Barbican should go to the Valley of the Meuse?"

I bowed my head.

The Princess eyed me curiously, and then broke out impetuously—

"Mr. Holdsworth, I believe in your honesty, but I also believe in your absolute——"

She hesitated, and I suggested—

"Foolishness."

She smiled, her eyes dancing with delight, and said, "Yes, let us call it your foolishness, though I was trying to think of a less hard word for your conduct. I had better be frank with you. The man who robbed you in the train was employed by us—yes, by my august father and myself. If we had not thought that you had the true emeralds, we should not have taken so much trouble. It was well done, was it not?"

Here my spirit was galled again. What right had this beautiful Princess to pretend that a carefully-planned robbery was "well done"? I felt like the proverbial worm, and I turned.

“No, madam,” I said hotly, “to obtain these jewels you perpetrated a crime; you had the meanness to blast the career of an unoffending man, who was only doing his duty, and then you ask me if it was well done? I say emphatically, No! it was not well done; and poor, weak, and completely in your power, I feel my blood boiling in my veins at such a question being put to me. God knows, madam, that an Englishman will often allow his nose to be brought to the grindstone, but there comes a moment when you find some steel in the cartilage!”

I was shaking with anger, and, I know, white with excitement. If you read novels you will see that the hero always turns red with rage, when he is intent upon some deed of derring-do. Never mind novels. If you get into a row, beware of the man who turns pale. Shall I tell you why? All the blood in his body has gone to his heart, and, however contemptible he may seem, he will fight like a lion till he has spent every drop of that self-same ichor. I am not saying this to prove my own valour. I am only stating a fact. Had the Princess ordered me off to instant execution, as I have no doubt she could have done by means of her semi-barbarian retainers, I should have met my

death with the stubborn unhappiness of an innocent offender. But the Princess deftly threw oil on the troubled waters of my spirit.

"You are right, Mr. Holdsworth," she exclaimed; "it was cowardly, from your point of view, to rob you in the train, but Herr von Breckstein could devise no other plan."

"Did your Royal Highness's confidential agent," I said contemptuously, "put forward no better plea for robbing Messrs. Batten & Chirrol's Bank in Piccadilly?"

The Princess turned as white as I had done, and stamped again upon the floor.

"Mr. Holdsworth," she cried indignantly, "let us have done with chicanery. I have told you that you were robbed, though I assert that recovery is not robbery, by my wish; but I beg you to understand that, despite your famous English police system, the Scotland Yard detectives were wholly at fault in confounding the bank robber, and——" she paused, and added, "our confidential agent. The bank robbery was committed by a real thief who wished to inculcate Herr von Breckstein."

"I should like, madam," I said sarcastically, "to submit the case to my friend, Mr. Bodkin, who is——"

The Princess interrupted me with a wave of her hand.

“Let me finish the sentence; it runs like this—‘in the service of the Hospodar of Zarinthia, and has been for many years.’”

I was dumbfounded, and could not utter a word.

The Princess gave a little laugh of satisfaction and went on—“You are surprised, Mr. Holdsworth, at this information. You imagined that the excellent Bodkin or Beddoes, a very reverend gentleman, should be employed by us, but remember that in cases of emergency a monarch has been known to make use of a picklock. Not that we have any reason to complain of the honesty of Mr. Bodkin. On the contrary, he has been true as steel to his trust; but, unfortunately, Mr. Bodkin, whatever be his disguise, Anglican or otherwise, is perfectly well known to the malefactors of Europe. This is the great fault of nearly all detectives. They imagine that, by putting on wigs or whiskers, colouring their complexions, or blackening their eyebrows, they can deceive the persons whose business it is not to be duped. Your friend, Mr. Bodkin, is, I allow, a sleuthhound on the trail; but, to use an English idiom which

you will understand, often when he thinks that he is chasing the fox, he is running after a red herring. Well, we want a fresh nose in our pack, and I have chosen you to run the quarry to the death."

"Why me, madam?" I asked, altogether puzzled by her metaphors.

"Because," she replied slowly, "you have an interest in the kill. There is one woman who knows where our true emeralds are to be found, not these worthless things," and she pointed to the paste gems of which I had such bitter remembrance; "and that woman is Hetty Cameron."

"Hetty Cameron!" I cried. "How should she know anything of this tissue of fraud?"

The Princess smiled with perhaps the loveliest smile of the interview. It was a mixture of amusement and compassion. Some individuals can throw expression into smiles, but, after all, the eyes tell the tale.

"Mr. Holdsworth," she said, "Miss Cameron is at Dinant with her uncle, Mr. Barbican, and—well, I had better tell you the truth," she added.

"In heaven's name, do, madam," I panted, in an agony of jealousy.

"Well," she said, still serenely smiling,



"Mr. Barbican has gone to Dinant to sell our emeralds."

"Then," I exclaimed, waxing warm, "Mr. Barbican is a thief!"

"You have exactly expressed my opinion, Mr. Holdsworth," replied the Princess. "There is a train for Dinant shortly after three. Hetty wants your help. I want the help of both of you. *Au revoir, et bon voyage.*"

She passed from the room, and as she did so I felt a touch on my shoulder. Semidazed, I found that the assault came from Kritz, who beckoned me to follow him. We passed into the street. In twenty-four hours I had never followed so many strangers before in my life.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *TO THE MEUSE.*

MECHANICALLY I went with Kritz to the railway station, mechanically I took a ticket for Dinant, mechanically I received from Kritz a letter and a little canvas bag, which I knew must contain money, and mechanically I bade him adieu. In fact, I felt that I had been transformed into a machine, and the joyous possibility of seeing Hetty again seemed blurred by the extraordinary adventure in which I had been the unwilling participator. Kritz, on the other hand, seemed delighted, not at the gold piece with which I presented him, but at the fact that I was relieved from *durance vile*. He wrote on his tablets—"I am so glad. What did I tell you?" And his eyes glistened with satisfaction.

I shook him by the hand, bade him tell J. J. that I had been summoned from Brussels, but would shortly return—at which

he grinned—and took my seat in one of the red velvet covered first-class carriages, which the Belgians put on their railways to please their German neighbours, but neither nationality ever appears to use them, both being of economical disposition. My journey to Namur was very uneventful. I opened both the letter and the bag. The missive merely contained these words—

“You will find Miss Cameron at the Hôtel Tête d’Or, Dinant. You had better send word to her rather than call. If you require further funds, write to Baron von Spielnitz, Cercle des Nobles, Brussels. Be brave, and fear not.”

That was all. In the canvas bag I found two thousand francs in notes and specie. Certainly, when I came to consider matters, it looked very much as if I had started on a wild-goose chase. In my usual matter-of-fact way I reasoned—

1. That my late employer, Mr. Barbican, had been branded as a thief by the Princess of Zarinthia.
2. That Hetty needed my help.
3. That I was quite ignorant of what Mr. Bodkin-Beddoes was doing, and whether I was to regard him as friend or enemy.
4. That the emeralds would be found at Dinant, and that I was to find them.

I confess that I looked with my mind's eye on this programme of adventure with anything but agreeable anticipation, and, if the truth be told, I reviled not only the emeralds but the entire dynasty of Zarinthia, excepting, of course, from my anathema the beauteous lady at whose bidding I was wending my way to the stream with which so much British blood has from time to time been commingled mainly on behalf of foreigners. Marlborough and Wellington were great generals, but, when one comes to think of it, their mightiest endeavours were made to prop up the rotten crowns of the Continent. "Blake's broom" on the seas, as handled by Oliver Cromwell, was of infinitely more use to the "right little, tight little island" than landing troops in Flanders. But, beyond following the British army in the matter of expletives, I cannot say that my journey to Namur was accompanied by much historical reflection.

After the example of many English wise-acres, those responsible for the Brussels-Namur railway have placed the station at the latter place as far from the centre of the town as possible. There may be a sound commercial reason for this in that the

situation undoubtedly benefits the cabs and omnibuses, but otherwise the arrangement is about as pleasant as that existing at, say, Harrow, where both companies ought to be prosecuted for misrepresentation of access to the "hill toppers." When I alighted on the Namur platform, clutching the bag which Master Kritz had brought for me, I could not help thinking of the singular coincidence which had brought me from the Rue de Namur to Namur itself. I was quite undetermined how to act, for I learned from a porter that there would be no train for Dinant for an hour and a half, when a hand smote me forcibly on the back. I turned round, and was greeted by the smiling countenance of Dick Thorpe.

"Good Lord! man," he cried, "who would have thought of seeing you here! What's your business?"

"And yours?" I replied, parrying the question as I wrung him by the hand.

"Oh, I was wired for this morning on account of my railway. It appears that they've come across some confounded freshet between Rochefort and Dinant."

"Dinant!" I cried, taken off my guard, "why, that's where I am bound for."

"Dinant!" echoed Thorpe, looking ex-

tremely puzzled. "Well, this is a rum time of year to visit the Ardennes. But perhaps you're going boar-shooting?"

I am not a very good liar, but I immediately clutched at the straw of romance thrown so opportunely to me.

"Yes, Dick," I said calmly, "I'm going boar-shooting near Dinant."

"Good business!" he responded heartily; "it's rather early for the game; but no matter; we'll travel together to-morrow morning."

"I want to get on to-night," I said sharply, "and——"

"Well," he put in with a jolly laugh, "you won't. Know you, Harry Holdsworth, that this same dead-alive town of Namur is running with two rivers, and flooded with a sea of the best Burgundy in the world. The boars of the Ardennes cannot be disturbed before we have drunk to their destruction in the finest red wine of this or any age, the liquor that has delighted princes, bishops, and citizens for centuries. As Denys says in 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' *le diable est mort!* We'll quaff to his interment."

"And Mrs. Thorpe?" I urged, thinking to spoke his wheel.

"Mrs. Thorpe," he replied gaily, "is taking

care of the German Emperor in Brussels. Remember, Harry Holdsworth, it is well to be tied by matrimony, but also remember that a holiday now and again helps the noose to sit all the easier. Come along, old chap," and, catching me by the arm, he hurried me out of the station, where he hailed a *fiacre*, and we were off before I could frame any sort of excuse, jolting over the uneven stones towards the inn of his choice, which I afterwards knew to be the Hôtel d'Harscamp, where we received a hearty welcome, and sat down to a meal which would have been difficult to match in Paris itself. As to the liquor, Dick Thorpe had not over-rated its excellence. For years this corner of the world has been the great centre of the Burgundian wine traffic. The grape juice of the old Duchy does not easily cross the channel. It gets as sea-sick as a Swiss sailor on the Lake of Geneva, and in England it is only fortuitously that we are allowed to taste of the real full-bodied nectar of eastern France. Favoured geographically, the Belgians have not only from time immemorial stored and trafficked in the wines of their neighbours, but they have also surpassed the producers of the wine

in their method of preserving the *bouquet* for which Burgundy is pre-eminent. The French keep the wine in the cask as long as possible, thereby giving to the wooden staves the perfume, which should belong to the drinker. The Belgians, on the contrary, bottle the wine as soon as possible, knowing that glass is no receiver of odour. At the hotel that evening Dick Thorpe and I did justice to their discrimination. It was an unworthy action, I am sure, for me to have stopped at Namur instead of pushing forward to Dinant, where my sweetheart needed my help, but, as you will presently see, the delay and the meeting with Thorpe were for the best. Indeed, had they not occurred, I should not now be writing the strange story of the emeralds. I suppose that I am a fatalist, but, at all events, I am also a philosopher. "All's for the best" has ever been my motto, and, not pretending to determine the Why and Wherefore of destiny, I am content to take Good and Ill as they come. We cannot reckon the millionth part of a second on the dial of God's clock.

Cheered by the generous wine, Thorpe opened like a rosebud placed in fresh water.



"Let me be frank with you, Harry," he said, holding his glass to the light of the gasalier, and admiring the cardinal tones of the wine. "This confounded freshet is not my only reason for scudding off to Dinant. I have also got to meet my rascal of a brother-in-law." I trembled so violently that my goblet fell from my grasp and broke upon the floor.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" asked Thorpe, as I stooped down and pretended to mop up the liquor with my napkin.

"Oh! nothing," I answered with a great effort. "I suppose that I wetted my fingers, and the glass slipped."

Thorpe laughed. "Never mind," he said, "they say that breaking a glass is lucky. I hope that it will be in my case, for, between you and me, I don't care about meeting Master Conrad."

"And yet," I cried, forgetting all prudence, "I believe him to be a thoroughly honest man."

Thorpe put down his glass and stared at me with undisguised surprise.

"You believe him to be a thoroughly honest man!" he ejaculated slowly. "And may I ask how you come to be acquainted with my

brother-in-law, Conrad von Breckstein, and on what grounds you believe him to be a thoroughly honest man?"

The fat was in the fire now, and my poor wits, for the moment, saw but little chance of avoiding a great conflagration. However, with one of those mental efforts which somehow or other often develop themselves when one is unnerved, I said—

"Because he is the brother of your wife."

It was about as inconsequent an answer as I could have made, but Thorpe accepted it in an instant.

"By Jove! Harry," he said warmly, "Lizzie must have converted you."

Again he had thrown me a straw, and again I gripped it.

"Yes," I said, thoroughly composed, "I suppose she must have."

But all the while, when I said "she" I meant the Princess. Such are the conscience compromises of the feeble.

"Well," continued Thorpe, "although I am glad to hear your good opinion of a man whom you have never seen, let me tell you that I am going to keep very wide awake when I meet him. Master Conrad won't get much out of me without satisfactory security." He said this with a self-satisfied smile as he blew

the smoke of his cigarette through his nostrils.

"Then," I put in, "I suppose your meeting with your brother-in-law is connected with some money matter?"

"My dear Harry," laughed Thorpe, "all my meetings with my brother-in-law have been connected with money matters. You must know that he has a craze, and that is a devotion bordering on madness, for the daughter of the Hospodar of Zarinthia."

"For the Princess of Zarinthia?" I faltered.

"For none other lady," replied Dick calmly. "For her sake he has sacrificed fortune, fame, and family, knowing that his own father was bitterly opposed to the pretensions of this semi-barbarian—I mean the Hospodar, not the Princess. For her he has thrown himself with all the enthusiasm of a fanatic into a cause, which is as hopeless as that of the Stuart pretenders to the throne of Great Britain. It is the beauty of the Princess which has turned his brain. For her sake I don't believe that he would stick at robbery or perhaps murder."

"And," I cried enthusiastically, "I don't wonder at it!"

Thorpe eyed me curiously. "My dear friend," he observed, "I didn't think that

this Burgundy was so strong. What on earth do you know about the Princess of Zarinthia or Conrad's infatuation?"

"Nothing," I stammered, "beyond what you've told me."

"And yet," Thorpe went on, "you can sit there and calmly declare that you approve of a man, whom you don't know, making an idiot of himself about a woman, whom you have never seen? I wish that my father-in-law, the Kaiser, could hear you. I am afraid that you would have a bad quarter of an hour. But come," he added, "you must have some reason for your Quixotism?"

"Only this," I answered, "that I like to hear in these degenerate days of a man like Conrad von Breckstein, who, for love of a woman, fears neither God nor man, who will sacrifice for her sake his life, maybe his honour, and but——" I paused, as a sudden thought flashed across me, and added, "What is your brother-in-law's object? What service is he trying to do for the lady of his heart? Is he seeking to stir up revolution, or to hire confederates?"

Thorpe laughed again, and then said, "He is endeavouring to perform the most impossible feat ever attempted by mortal man."

"And that is——?" I asked.

"To recover the lost emeralds of Zarinthia, and lay them at the feet of his royal mistress," answered Thorpe, flicking his cigarette-ash on to the floor. "He might as well attempt to scale the mountains of the moon, or try to travel from Liverpool to New York under the Atlantic."

"Why so?" I asked, my blood rushing through my veins, and my heart palpitating like a steam engine.

"Because," replied Thorpe, filling his glass, "for the recovery of the emeralds of Zarinthia, the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen, one of the richest princes in the world, would give the half of his fortune."

"Not quite so much as that," I broke in, carried away by my own knowledge, "say £25,000."

"Upon my word, Harry," said Dick contemptuously, "you seem to know more of this business than I do."

I felt that I did, but did not speak, as Thorpe went on—"Look here, my father-in-law, no fool, would find, say, a couple of millions sterling for the recovery of the gems, and, I expect, would make about as much for himself from the Grand Duke. Perhaps I exaggerated when I said that the

Grand Duke would give half his fortune, for he must be worth at least thirty millions."

"Of marks?" I suggested.

"No, man," said Thorpe, "of English sovereigns, safely banked, too, in England. He's a sort of King of the Belgians in that respect."

"But why," I asked, "if the emeralds be of such enormous value, are they now missing?"

Thorpe smiled sardonically.

"The emeralds themselves," he said, "are not of such vast value, but the Principality of Zarinthia is worth a very round sum. Without the emeralds no one can be acknowledged Hospodar, even though he prove his birthright in a way calculated to satisfy the Judicial Committee in the House of Lords. And gems such as these are not negotiable, be it remembered, in the open market. You might far more easily dispose of the Koh-i-Noor. But there, I have drifted away from my subject, which was that of seeing my brother-in-law. He has wired to me to meet him at the Tête d'Or, Dinant."

"Tête d'Or!" I exclaimed. "Why, that's where——" Recollecting myself I exclaimed, "Some friends of mine stayed last summer."

“Good!” said Thorpe, “and so will we tomorrow, where you shall see this Bayard to whom you have taken such a fancy.”

At this moment the door of the *salle à manger* was thrown open and a waiter entered with a card on a plate.

“Monsieur Hamilton?” he asked.

“No one of that name here,” observed Thorpe.

“But the gentleman is positive,” said the waiter.

I was on the horns of dilemma again, for, looking at the card, I saw that it was inscribed “The Rev. John Beddoes.”

“Ah!” I said to the waiter, “I know Monsieur, but he has mistaken my surname. I was christened Henry Hamilton,” I observed to Thorpe, with all the calm assurance of a liar, “and dear old Beddoes will insist upon always calling me Hammy. I’ll go and bring him in.”

“Do,” said Thorpe; “not that I’m very partial to parsons, but if he’s a pal of yours, I’ve no doubt that he isn’t above sharing a bottle and smoking a pipe.”

Without answering him I sped into the passage, and there, sure enough, was my friend Mr. Bodkin, beaming, and more ecclesiastical than ever. As we shook hands I whispered—

“How on earth did you know I was here?”

“I had a wire from J. J.,” he answered; “the scent’s very warm—very warm—we shall kill I hope this time, Mr. Hamilton.”

“Holdsworth!” I said angrily, “there’s a friend of mine inside. Come in, but for goodness sake call me Holdsworth—or Hamilton Holdsworth, or better still Hammy.”

“I’ll address you as Bacon if you wish it,” observed Mr. Bodkin imperturbably, “but remember that I’m Beddoes.”

Then raising his voice he exclaimed—

“My dear Hammy, this is indeed a joyous occasion. I only heard of your arrival by accident!”

We entered the room, when I introduced the detective to Thorpe, who greeted him warmly.

“Beddoes! Beddoes!” he said, “I remember a Cornish clergyman of your name.”

“No doubt,” assented Mr. Bodkin, “you refer to my hon. cousin, the Dean of Marazion. He ought to have been made a bishop, but, alas! he coquetted with the Wesleyans. No flirting with dissent is my motto, Mr. Thorpe.”



"Quite so," responded Dick. "I hope you'll have better luck than your cousin, and take your seat in the House of Lords."

"I may one of these days, D.V.," said Mr. Bodkin, with a sacerdotal upraising of his eyebrows; "but, meantime, allow me to commemorate this happy meeting by standing a bottle of the best. Kindly ring the bell, Shemmy."

"Shemmy!" echoed Thorpe.

"Bless you," said Mr. Bodkin, "my dear ward here is sometimes Shemmy, sometimes Japhey, but always Hammy—a kind of Noah's Ark arrangement."

The impudence of Mr. Bodkin nearly caused me to burst out laughing, little inclined as I was to hilarity.

The bottle duly arrived, and two other flagons followed. The last remembrance I have of the evening was Mr. Bodkin recounting a veracious and amusing anecdote of the Archbishop of Canterbury, "which is as true, Mr. Thorpe," he added, "as my name is Beddoes."

But I knew from the way in which he said "till to-morrow early," when I bade him good-night, that the scent was indeed hot.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *THE WILINESS OF MR. BODKIN.*

I WAS up very early the next morning, and I well remember that there was a pungent mist overhanging sleepy Namur, that reminded me of Kew or Richmond, when they have not been sufficiently dried by the sun. I am not one of those misguided bipeds who readily leave the nest at an impossible hour to feast on worms. I prefer to breakfast very much later on more substantial food. But on this particular occasion I knew that Mr. Bodkin would expect to see me before the world was quite awake. Nor was I mistaken, for when I descended the stairs and went out into the courtyard, I found the worthy detective, apparently callous of chill, seated on a bench reading the *Guardian*. He was smoking a pipe, and by his side stood a large beer glass half emptied of its contents, apparently milk.

“Good-morning,” said Mr. Bodkin, laying

down his paper, "I am glad to see that you took my tip of last night—I meant it. Now you'd better have a refresher, because we start for Liège in half an hour."

I was about to object when he whispered, "I mean what I say." Then he added aloud in most indifferent French, and in a very loud voice, "Garsong, un lait et schnapps."

An unkempt varlet put his head out of one of the windows of the *salle à manger*, where he was evidently cleaning up, and responded in excellent English, "At once, sir."

"Internationalism" observed Mr. Bodkin, taking a pinch of snuff, "is one of the greatest methods of civilisation. You observe that I addressed that rascal in French, and he replied in English. No doubt if I had spoken to him in Hindustani, he would have answered in Chinese."

The internationalist at that moment appeared, bearing a beaker resembling the one handled by Mr. Bodkin.

"Drink!" said the detective, "it'll keep off the bad effects of the atmosphere. The life of many a poor curate in the fen country might have been saved by a similar remedy. Drink, I say, drink!"

I quaffed and found the mixture agreeable to the palate and fortifying to

the nerves. I believe the draught to have been composed of *kirschwasser* and milk, but I have never asked Mr. Bodkin, and he has never volunteered the information, though now and again he says when we meet, "Ah! Mr. Hamilton, do you remember my Namur tonic—patent, A1 registered at Lloyd's?" and then he winks sagaciously.

Anyway I finished the liquid and felt refreshed.

"And now, Mr. Hamilton," he observed in a low tone, "get your overcoat and walking-stick. We leave this hotel in ten minutes. You can entrust your bag to the porter. I said, 'Liège in half an hour,' just now, because I saw the internationalist had his ear to that open window, but as a matter of fact, our route lies just the other way. Dinant is our destination."

"Dinant!" I cried utterly astounded, "why that is where my friend Thorpe is going to!"

"I know that," replied Mr. Bodkin, "but we must be there before him."

"But he knows that *I* am going to Dinant," I said rather angrily, "and we agreed to travel together."

"I also know that," responded Mr. Bodkin without a quiver of his eyelids, as he "rappeed"

his nostrils very plentifully; "but nevertheless you must come, if you value the love of your sweetheart, with *me*. This is no time to talk, man; get your overcoat and stick; settle your bill, and leave a line for Thorpe, saying that you have gone to Liège to buy a rifle. You were talking some nonsense about shooting wild boars in the Ardennes last night."

I longed for an explanation, but I did all that Mr. Bodkin suggested, and handed, feeling very guilty, my note of mendacity to the internationalist, to whom the detective communicated the fact that we were going to inspect the iron works of the great house of Cockerill at Liège, but hoped to return in a couple of days. The internationalist, having been handsomely tipped, ventured to recommend an hotel at Liège to our notice, and recommenced his waxing of parquet and polishing of window.

Once outside the courtyard I was about to turn to the right, but Mr. Bodkin motioned me to go to the left.

"That's not the way to the railway station," I said.

"No," he answered, "but it is my way to the river."

"The river!" I exclaimed, "why the river?"

"Because," he said, "the railway station's watched. There's a French tug bound for Givet waiting for us on the quay. I chartered her two days ago, but before we start a little change of raiment is necessary. Come along. Don't talk for a little while, for our accent might betray us." He led the way over a bridge, crossing the Sambre on its passage to the Meuse, and plunged down a narrow street. We halted before a mean-looking *cabaret*, with the usual bush hanging over the door. Mr. Bodkin, after looking behind him and before him, beckoned me to follow him, and entered the establishment. He walked quickly over the sanded floor of the public-house, giving a peculiar whistle. Not a soul was to be seen. At the same time a little door at the other end of the taproom was quickly opened. We passed through it, and I was amazed to find myself confronted by none other personage than J. J. himself, who quietly closed the door behind us.

"Punctual as usual, Mr. Beddoes," he observed, without taking any notice of my surprise.

"Yes," replied Mr. Bodkin, "I'm like a good watch, and try to keep time when I'm wound up. Have you everything ready?"

"Everything," replied J. J., pointing to a pile of clothes on the dingy sofa.

"To work then," said Mr. Bodkin, beginning to pull off his coat. "Now, Mr. Hamilton, I'm going to ask you to be good enough to strip."

"Strip!" I ejaculated.

"Yes," said Mr. Bodkin. "You and I have got to be changed into English navvies, and these," he added, pointing to the clothes, "are our togs. J. J. will give us a helping hand. Don't ask any questions just at present, but do what I ask you. We're employed on the Dinant-Rochefort Railway, that's all."

I could not resist putting one query. "But why," I asked, "did you ask me to bring my overcoat and walking-stick?"

"Because, my dear sir," replied the detective, taking off his trousers, "I noticed that your overcoat is of somewhat peculiar cut, very fashionable in England, say, at Newmarket, or Kempton Park, but much too noticeable in Belgium, while on your walking-stick is a most conspicuous silver monogram of 'H. H.'"

"What then?" I asked, as I also shifted my pantaloons.

"Only," proceeded Mr. Bodkin, as he put

on a pair of corduroys, "that this afternoon the Rev. Mr. Beddoes and Mr. Henry Hamilton, equipped as per description, will arrive as per announcement at Liège, and that their presence there will be duly noted to certain individuals interested in their travels. Somebody will represent the Rev. Mr. Beddoes. Somebody else will represent Mr. Henry Hamilton."

"But how can this be done?" I asked.

"I leave this little matter to J. J.," replied Mr. Bodkin, who was rubbing his face with a dirty looking ruddy mixture.

"And you will not be disappointed," chuckled J. J., as he handed me a pair of muddy boots weighing about six pounds apiece.

"Then," I said, "do I understand that some one is going to wear my clothes, and take my name?"

"Yes, Mr. *Hamilton*," replied Mr. Bodkin, with a strong stress on "Hamilton," "and have you not *your* instructions?"

"Be brave, and fear not," observed J. J., as he offered me a belcher handkerchief.

These words brought back those of the Princess's letter. I no longer resented the masquerade. On the contrary, I transformed myself with all the eagerness of a forger



trying to escape the police, and in less time than it takes to record, I was converted into a very passable counterfeit of that pioneer of capital and civilisation, the British "navvy." Mr. Bodkin's transfiguration was even more successful, but I noted that he sighed as he folded up his clerical garments.

"It's very hard," he said sadly, "to rejoin the laity, when one has been a dignitary of the church. After all, Darwin's primæval tail does not affect mankind so much as fashion's modern tailor. Imagine a bishop without gaiters! The bench would be doomed. In short, mankind is ruled by togs."

I then noticed for the first time, so astonished had I been by the proceedings, that J. J. himself in nowise displayed the glory of attire in which he had appeared during our stroll in Brussels. On the contrary, he looked like a coachman out of place. He had forgotten nothing to complete our disguises—the tin can, the knee straps, and even the flap-caps, all were there. There was a broken looking-glass over the mantel-piece, and as I looked at my reflection in it, I wondered whether I was a dupe or a fool. But the thought of Hetty and the Princess came across my brain, and I hesitated no longer.

"We must be starting," said Mr. Bodkin. "Your name now," he added, turning to me, "is Ben Barlow, and mine is Dick Richards."

For the life of me I could not resist it, and I remarked pointedly—

"You really ought to be a parson, you're such a ready hand at christening others."

Mr. Bodkin quivered, and J. J. smiled for the first time.

"Come," said Mr. Bodkin, "this is no time for jesting. See that my instructions are carried out, J. J., and, Ben Barlow, *en route!*"

We left the *cabaret* without having seen any one but the landlord of the Rue de Namur. His parting words were—

"There shall be nothing wanting on my part. God help the right!"

"Amen!" said Mr. Bodkin, with an air which would have done credit to a parish clerk.

Silently we trudged along till we came to a desolate-looking quay by the side of the Meuse. There was a bit of a breeze, and the trees on the bank were shedding their leaves as profusely as does a woman in distress her tears. Alongside the stonework beneath there was moored a long, narrow vessel—a sort of cross between a penny

steamer and a miniature blockade runner. Her steam was up, and a man in a long coat, with a gold band round his cap, presumably the captain, was standing by the gangway. Directly he perceived us he sprang on board, and evidently gave some orders to a man in a blue blouse, who ran to the wheel, which, from the way in which it was fixed, reminded me of a roulette machine. Mr. Bodkin never opened his mouth as we went aboard. He touched his hat to the captain. I did likewise. Our salutes were returned, and a minute afterwards the ropes were cast loose and the steamer heading south against the current, for the Meuse, like the Nile and the Rhine, flows north. Mr. Bodkin motioned me to go below, and we soon found ourselves in a very base and uncomfortable cabin, dignified, I suppose, by the owners with the name of saloon, for *La Constitution Belge*—such was the name of the boat—was, in the summer months, used for passenger traffic on the river. But the table was laid with a clean cloth, on which were cups, saucers, plates, knives, and forks, and, almost as soon as we were seated, who should appear but the ubiquitous Kritz, bearing a tray laden with a coffee pot, hot milk, and several smoking dishes, sausages, bacon,

eggs, and the like. I allow that the entrance of the mute caused me very little astonishment. I had grown so hardened to surprises that, if the Hospodar himself had brought in the emeralds on a silver charger, I should have been as stoical as a Red Indian. Kritz grinned and bowed, and poured out the *café au lait*. Mr. Bodkin helped the viands, and, still without uttering any but the most commonplace remarks, we made a very hearty meal. When it was over I felt decidedly more cheerful, and so I am sure did my companion, for he snuffed vigorously—he had not forgotten his box of rappee—and then, handing me a cigar, he observed, “I think we had better shut the door and open a porthole. Kritz, stand sentry.”

Kritz bowed as usual, while Mr. Bodkin let some welcome air into the stuffy cabin. As he did so, he observed with a chuckle, “Those paddles make such a confounded noise that the Meuse itself couldn’t hear our secrets, eh, Ben Barlow?”

He spoke truly, for the propelling wheels were flapping round with din enough to have drowned the voice of Mr. John Burns, and that is saying a great deal.

“All the better,” said Mr. Bodkin-Beddoes-

Richards. "Not that there's a soul on board who understands English except Kritz, and he's a good lad, if there ever was one. Now, Mr. Holdsworth," he went on earnestly, "we're engaged upon an expedition, which demands all the energy and tact possible. We've got to deal with men who'll stick at nothing. *Ergo*, we'll have to do the same."

"I'm quite ready," I exclaimed. "I'll hold to you through thick and thin, and follow your instructions to the letter."

I held out my hand, which Mr. Bodkin grasped with a very hearty squeeze.

"I am sure of it," he exclaimed. "But remember we have to deal with men as artful as waggon-loads of monkeys, as cunning as armies of serpents, and as determined as a British man-of-war in presence of the enemy. Of course you know now that the emeralds of which you were robbed were forgeries?"

I nodded my head.

"Well," continued Mr. Beddoes, "I'm now going to introduce you to the real articles."

"What!" I cried, "have you got them at last?"

"Of course not," he said contemptuously, "or you and I wouldn't be taking this sort of cruise disguised like

Adelphi supers. But I know where to find them."

"Who has them?" I asked eagerly.

"Of the precise holder of the gems I am not certain," he answered slowly. "The matter rests between three suspects, as we say, and they are Paul Délaz, his confederate, and the respectable Mr. Barbican; for choice I should say the latter."

"And yet you pretended to be in his employ," I said with some sarcasm. "How do you reconcile that fact with your conscience?"

"Have you ever read the life of Major le Caron, the English spy who sold the Fenians?" he asked wistfully.

"Yes," I answered.

"I am of the same breed," observed Mr. Bodkin quietly. "I work for the right; and when I tell you that the Grand Duke will be at Dinant to-morrow to get possession of the emeralds, you must know that we have a tough job before us."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *IN FULL CRY—THE END OF J. J.*

"LET'S go on deck now," said Mr. Bodkin. "I've nothing more to tell you at present."

"Only one question," I cried. "Jackson, in your presence, declared that Mr. Barbican left Brussels alone. How then comes it about that Miss Cameron has rejoined her uncle?" Mr. Bodkin, as Dick Richards, looked at me somewhat curiously, took a pinch of snuff and exclaimed—

"Good heavens, man, can't you see that she is trying to clear YOU from the suspicion under which you rest? She knows the real thief, and, like the plucky girl that she is, has not scrupled to sacrifice everything for your sake and that of the Princess."

"Of the Princess!" I ejaculated.

"Yes! of the Princess of Zarinthia.

You told J. J. that Miss Cameron's grandmother was French, and had displeased her family by turning Protestant. Well, perhaps you don't know that she was the Marquise Emilie de la Roche-Blanche, the intimate friend of the Hospodar of Zarinthia, the mother of the exiled Hospodar, that the friendship has been hereditary, and that the Princess and Miss Cameron were brought up together by Mrs. Cameron at a house on Camden Hill. But the Princess was then known as Miss Janet Smith. You haven't heard this, I suppose?"

"Never," I answered, "but why didn't Hetty—Miss Cameron—ever mention this to me?"

"I suppose," answered Mr. Bodkin calmly, "that she was bound over to secrecy."

"Lovers should have no secrets," I said hotly.

"I thought they always had," observed Mr. Bodkin, with a sly grin.

"And then what part does Mr. Barbican play in your drama?" I asked scornfully.

"The old rôle," replied Mr. Bodkin, "unequaled by the impersonation of



Judas Iscariot in A.D. 33. You look a bit white about the gills. Come on deck as I suggested; the Meuse is really a very picturesque river indeed. I think it in many respects superior to the Rhine in beauty."

The day had progressed in grateful attributes. The breeze had driven away the mist, and, having done its duty, had dropped into an early slumber, and the sun was vigorously asserting himself, when I sat down to meditate on the strangeness of my position, the perfidy of Barbican, and the devotion of my darling Hetty. As we clinked and clanked along, the paddles seemed to sing a strange song of mingled emotion with full chorus, only broken whenever we halted at one of those great granite locks, which would put the most magnificent on the Thames to shame. Mr. Bodkin did not interrupt my reflections, but occupied himself with studying the same *Churchman's Almanack* from which he had given ecclesiastical information to the false Misses Leckington.

He had the air, despite his incongruous garments, of an archdeacon about to attend the christening of a reclaimed dissenter.

"It is curious," he observed, quite forgetful

of his costume, "that from time immemorial the Church of England has been the bulwark of the rights of the people, the most beneficent and most tolerant mother, the best example of what a National Church should be, and yet so abhorred by a truculent portion of the populace that they would rather accept the exotic yoke of Rome, or the brutal Calvinism of Clapham Common." He sighed deeply, but I made no response, as he once more buried himself in the study of his orthodox pamphlet. As the steamer went on panting against the stream, I took but small heed of the beautiful banks between which the river flowed, but I have been in those parts since, and I can cordially recommend the Meuse and the country round about to lovers of the picturesque.

Our craft came to a halt just beyond the last lock on the side opposite to Dinant.

"We'll land here, mate," said Mr. Bodkin, "it isn't much of a tramp to the bridge."

He waved his hand to the captain, and we stepped ashore on to one of those stone-paved roads, bordered by poplars, which are so well liked by the road commissioners of the Continent.

"I feel," observed Mr. Bodkin, "like the Apostle Paul, on his way to Damascus. But

henceforth the Scriptures must be unnoticed in this God-forsaken land. Forward!"

I answered him never a word, as we went ahead, jeered by the dirty little boys in blue blouses, who thought that they saw foreign capital importing foreign labour, in the persons of the two English navvies. We passed over the bridge together, to the side where the church, with its tall, melon-topped tower, rises to meet the citadel, once a fortress, now not even what Vauban would deem a satisfactory *tête du pont* in these days of quick-firing artillery. In the little square I espied the hostelry, Tête d'Or, and I could not help exclaiming, "She is there!"

"Yes," observed Mr. Bodkin-Beddoes-Richards, "but you're not, nor are you likely to be to-day. We have to get to Anseremme, a village further up the river, where it is joined by the Lesse, another stream."

How anxiously did I regard the inn as we passed. Beyond the main entrance, I could see several guests lounging about in a covered courtyard, but neither Hetty nor her uncle was of the company. We trudged on over the flagstones, high cliffs rising like a rampart on our left, till we arrived at a spot where the road went clean through the rock, leaving on the side next to the river a giant

monolith. "That's what they call the *rocher à Bayard*," remarked my companion, "but I don't suppose the gentleman, without fear or reproach, ever set foot in these regions. Yet it's just like the Belgians to take the trouble to stick a weather cock on the top of it, in honour of the King passing by. But we're just at the end of our walk."

Shortly afterwards we came to a halt, at a mean-looking *cabaret* with the everlasting bush hanging over the door. Mr. Bodkin walked in, and seated himself on a bench. Here, as at Namur, he was evidently expected, for we had scarcely come in when a dark, black-whiskered man, dressed like ourselves, entered, and shook hands with the detective. Mr. Bodkin called for "schnapps," and a dirty girl, in wooden shoon, brought us three glasses of the worst potato spirit possible. It was not even made up to resemble brandy, whisky, or kirschwasser. It was the fiery, undiluted fermented juice of the tuber, and Mr. Bodkin's usually impassive countenance wrinkled with laughter when he saw the agony which the vile stuff caused me.

"I didn't tell you to drink it," he said quietly. "I don't mean to, nor does my pal, Harry Bint," he added, indicating the new arrival.

"Not much," observed Mr. Bint, with a wink of his eyes; "my inwards ain't made of cast iron."

"You can speak, Harry, before my pal," went on Mr. Bodkin. "Is there any news?"

"Yes," replied the dark-whiskered man, "the deal's on to-day at the cavern of the Gripeau."

"The cavern of the Gripeau!" echoed Mr. Bodkin, "where's that?"

"About four miles up the valley of the Lesse," answered Harry Bint, "just where they're making the new cutting."

Mr. Bodkin gave a soft whistle.

"You're certain, Harry?" he asked.

"I wish I was as certain of the winner of next year's Derby," replied the other.

The tone in which he said this made me start.

"Mr. Jackson?" I whispered interrogatively.

"None other," replied the black-whiskered navvy, with a grin, "but mum's the word."

Mr. Bodkin enjoyed the situation, and took a pinch of snuff with a chuckle.

"Those blessed horses," he said, "will always betray you, J. J."

"Amen!" observed that worthy, in a tone

of voice so like that of Mr. Bodkin that I could not help laughing.

"Come, come," said the detective, "this is no laughing matter. Now, J. J., about this cavern of the Gripeau, at what time is the meeting, and who are to be there?"

"The appointment," replied J. J., "is at four o'clock, and the company engaged, as the *Era* would say, consists of Mr. Barbican and Miss Hetty Cameron."

"Impossible," I broke in, "Miss Cameron would not be mixed up in such an affair."

"But she is," observed J. J. calmly, "because, to avert suspicion, her uncle has told her to accompany him to the cavern, which they will visit as tourists in the Ardennes."

"Subtle man, Mr. Barbican," murmured Mr. Bodkin, "go on, J. J."

"The cast will be completed," continued the Rue de Namur landlord, "by the engagement of Paul Délaz and the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen."

"The Grand Duke!" I cried.

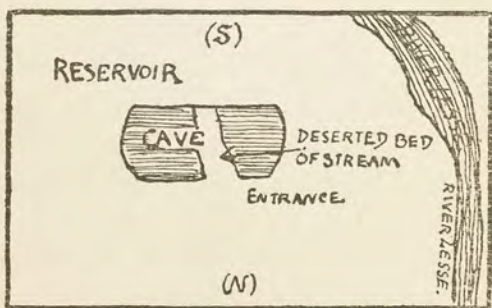
"Even so," went on Mr. Jackson, "and I suppose three spectators."

"Meaning," interposed Mr. Bodkin, "Ben Barlow, Dick Richards, and Harry Bint."

"Precisely," said J. J.

"Now tell me," said Mr. Bodkin eagerly, "what are the means of entrance and exit to this cavern?"

"There is only one entrance to the grotto," replied J. J. "It is one of those stalactite grottoes, pretty common in this part of Belgium, and used to be a show place till the railway contractors dammed the stream, which ran through it to the Lesse. This company bought the cave, and use it for storing their dynamite in. There used to be two openings, but the farther one has been walled up, and an immense reservoir formed outside. It's like this," and he drew on the table, with a bit of charcoal, a rough diagram, which I reproduce as far as I can remember it.



"Good," observed Mr. Bodkin, as he wiped out the plan with his sleeve, "good.

We shall have them like rats in a trap. Have the Belgian police any inkling of the matter?"

"Not the least," answered J. J. composedly, "and if they had, they wouldn't interfere. How could they?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Bodkin reflectively; "you're not perhaps aware that Mr. Richard Thorpe, the chief engineer of the new line, is on his way to Dinant to meet his brother-in-law, Conrad Breckstein."

J. J. struck the table with a heavy hand, which upset the glasses.

"By God!" he cried, "what a d——d, thousand-to-one idiot I've been!"

"No doubt," observed Mr. Bodkin quietly, "but why?"

"Because," replied J. J., "I know now the man who has been feeding me with information about the movements of Mr. Barbican."

"Pish!" said Mr. Bodkin contemptuously, taking a pinch of snuff, "you might have guessed it. Come, tell me where and when did you see your informant last? What was he like?"

"I met him," answered J. J., "about a fortnight ago, at the restaurant of the Grand Hotel, in Brussels, and he told me that——"

But what he communicated to J. J. was



never known, for, as he spoke, there was heard the sharp ping of a revolver from outside the open window, and simultaneously the unfortunate J. J. staggered to his feet and fell with a crash upon the floor, with blood streaming from his left temple.

With a joint cry of horror, Mr. Bodkin and I tried to raise him up, while the dirty girl who had served us, and a still dirtier man in a blouse, whom we afterwards knew to be the landlord, rushed from the back of the *cabaret* to the door, screaming, "*Assassins! voleurs! au secours!*" Poor J. J. uttered not a sound the while the life blood was trickling from his head, and puddling on the stones with which the room was paved. He was evidently dead. Mr. Bodkin was the first to recover himself.

"How terrible!" he exclaimed, and then, leaping to his feet, he caught hold of the man and woman, and pulled them inwards from the open door, round which a little crowd of neighbours had gathered.

"Silence!" he cried, in a voice of thunder. "Silence! Don't you see that this is a case for the police? Has any one perceived the murderer?"

The excited crowd, with many gesticulations, answered in the negative, and some

of the women began to shriek and the men to swear. The landlord shook like a leaf, but Mr. Bodkin preserved his presence of mind.

"See, you," he exclaimed, "a most cowardly crime has been committed. My compatriot, a worker like myself, has been assassinated—God knows why. It is for myself and my companion to report this cruel deed to the English engineer, his employer. Meantime, *patron*, take charge of the body of our poor friend, while we take measures for the arrest of the villain. Remove him to some quiet room, and we will take measures that speedy justice shall be done."

"Bravo! bravo!" murmured the onlookers.

"Come," said Mr. Bodkin, "who will volunteer to carry the corpse into some other chamber?"

"It is against the law," remarked a swarthy peasant, "for any one to lay a finger on that body till the gendarmes have certified to his death."

Again the little crowd murmured assent.

"Then send a messenger at once to Dinant," observed Mr. Bodkin, calm as ever; "but it is necessary that my friend's death should be notified immediately to his

employers. They are rich and powerful. Who will fetch the authorities?"

"I will," said the swarthy man; "my brother is a warder at the prison."

"Good!" observed Mr. Bodkin, "here's five francs for your trouble. Be quick or we shall not catch the assassin. As for us, we must raise the hue and cry in other quarters."

He flung the silver on the table, and, touching me on the arm, pointed up the valley of the Lesse, with a gesture of mingled energy and despair. The crowd respectfully parted to allow us to proceed, while the landlord wrung his hands, and the dirty girl wept with loud, convulsive sobs. I was quite overcome, and accompanied Mr. Bodkin with uncertain steps. Overcome with the tragedy of which I had been witness, neither of us spoke as we walked beside the Lesse, pouring its swift current beneath the browning woods, into the calmer Meuse. At last, when we had gone about a mile and a half, Mr. Bodkin stopped, and wiped his brow.

"Do you know," he asked, "who shot J. J.?"

I shook my head, unable to talk under the fearsome circumstances.

"I do," he said coolly. "Conrad Breckstein."

I groaned aloud.

"And do you know why?" he continued, "because J. J. was a traitor to both parties. By heaven! that Breckstein sticks at nothing!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *THE SCENT BREAST-HIGH.*

THE statement of Mr. Bodkin that Conrad Breckstein had murdered J. J. filled me with horror and indignation.

"I suppose," I said, "you will declare next that Breckstein attempted to assassinate the Hospodar."

"Ah," he remarked coolly, "J. J. told me all about that episode, and your strange imprisonment. No; Breckstein, of course, was not guilty of that crime. It was some emissary of the Grand Duke, without a doubt."

"Well," I said impatiently, "what do you intend doing now?"

"Fulfilling my duty," replied Mr. Bodkin sternly; "see that you do yours!"

"You mean," I exclaimed, "that after that ghastly tragedy at Anseremme you do not hesitate to continue this reckless adventure."

"I do," answered Mr. Bodkin. "If you are afraid, we can part company here. I will explain the reason of your absence to Miss Cameron."

Stung to the quick, I said hotly, "I am no coward, as you know, Mr. Bodkin. Lead on and I'll follow."

"Spoken like a hero," observed the detective, as he anointed his nostrils. "Forward then! again! and remember that there is no looking back."

We followed the course of the Lesse in silence, on the left bank, along the portion of the new line which had already been constructed, but was only being used by the trucks of the contractors. We met two or three of these working trains laden with excavated earth and chalk, but not one returning empty passed to give us a lift on our journey. The men on the trucks hailed us—sometimes in German, sometimes in French, but more often in English. After we had walked for over half an hour, Mr. Bodkin shouted to the driver of a panting engine—

"Are we right for the Gripeau?"

"Right you are, new hands," returned the grimy driver, "and right let it be when you come to the ford about half a mile further."

“The Gripeau—by the great dam on the other side of the river—good luck.”

“The same to you,” returned the man on the locomotive, “what’s favourite for the Leger?”

“I don’t know,” screamed Mr. Bodkin, as the roughly-coupled trucks jolted and jangled past us towards Anseremme.

“It’s a wonderful fact, isn’t it,” observed Mr. Bodkin, “how our working classes can’t get away from betting on horse racing? The manager of the firm which prints ‘Hymns Old and New’ told me that he was obliged to have all the latest wires about the great events posted in the composing rooms, to prevent the men from rushing out to buy the evening papers. It don’t seem the right thing, but you know the old adage, ‘time is money.’ We can’t be far off the ford now. Have you felt in what the Yankees call the pistol pocket of your cords?”

“No,” I replied, “I haven’t.”

“Well, do so,” said Mr. Bodkin, “and you’ll find what may be a friend indeed in case of need. But don’t show it.”

I did so, and gripped the butt of what I knew must be a revolver.

“Gently,” observed Mr. Bodkin dryly. “It’s seven-chambered and loaded. When

going to beat a jungle, always be prepared for the wild beasts."

I made no reply, but admired the singular foresight of my companion, who always seemed prepared for any emergency.

The ford, when we reached it, was in a state of considerable activity. An iron bridge was being built across the stream, and the noise of the hammers as they beat upon the bolts was almost deafening. Alongside the construction a large mud-stained barge, capable of transporting horses, trollies, and machinery, and worked on the chain system, was continuously passing to and fro. It was just starting as we arrived.

"Jump in, mate," cried Mr. Bodkin, "or we shall be left behind." On board there were only two men too busy in counting some crates to notice us. As we swung across the river I noticed a cluster of wooden sheds under the hillside a little further up the valley, in the midst of which a tall chimney arose, and the throb of a steam engine could be distinctly heard.

"That'll be the pumping station of the Gripeau," whispered the detective. "We've nearly reached our destination."

"I'm parched with thirst," I said. "I hope we shall be able to get a drink."



“Trust navvies for that,” observed Mr. Bodkin, as the barge grounded on the shore. “Anyway,” he added grimly, “we know that there’s plenty of water.”

We scrambled up the rough, rut-torn road on the river side which led towards the pumping station, and in ten minutes were in the midst of the wooden huts. Very few inhabitants of the mushroom village were to be seen, and they were all in too much of a hurry to pay any attention to us, for English navvies were doubtless as plentiful round about the Gripeau as were nuts and bilberries in the thick woods which surrounded us on all sides. My companion halted before a tenement with benches about the doorway, and on the front of the structure were, in flaring letters, the following inscriptions:—

“GRAND HOTEL DE LA GRIPEAU.”

“A BOIRE ET À MANGER À TOUTES HEURES.”

“Englisch-spokken. Hier Man Sprech Deutsch.”

“Vins, PALE ALE, SAUER KRAUT, EIRISH WHISKI.

“SCHNAPPS, LAGER BIER, CHESTER CHEESE.

“SAUSAGE, MARINITER-HÄRENG, etc., etc., etc.

“NO TEEK. ROOL BRITANNIA!”

---

“JACOB BREITHOFER, Propriétaire.”

“We’d better have a bite and a sup,” observed Mr. Bodkin, entering the estab-

lishment, which, despite its grandiloquent announcement of being a grand hotel, was a roughly constructed *estaminet*, run apparently by a German of Jewish extraction, for a hook-nosed man with a scrubby black beard, no coat or waiscoat, and a very dirty shirt, on the front of which glittered a diamond brooch, came forward as we entered the frowzy, sanded parlour.

“*Englisch navigatorz?*” he said inquiringly, waving a hand dirtier than his shirt, but more plentifully adorned with gems.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Bodkin. “What can we have to eat and drink?”

“You can haf anythink for monish,” observed the Jew, with a greasy smile. “Haf you monish?”

The detective threw a twenty-franc piece on the table. The landlord took it up, and bit it with his two remaining orange-coloured front fangs.

“It is goot,” he said. “What vill you haf? I can gif you the Bass bier, the Shester sheese, the kalt rosbeef, the hamschinken, the——”

“That will do,” interrupted Mr. Bodkin; “only be quick about it, as we have to report ourselves to the foreman. Where can we wash our hands?”

"In the yart at the back of the hotel," replied the Jew, "is a pomp of prachtfol wasser. I sharge fifty zentimes for the zoap."

"Hand over the soap," said the detective, "and show us the way."

The landlord opened a door and ushered us into a filthy ten-foot court, choked with broken bottles and putrefying vegetable refuse. In one corner was a pump. The Jew handed him a square inch of yellow soap.

"What about a towel?" exclaimed my companion, with a disgusted sniff.

"I sharge vivty zentimes for the zerviette," said the landlord, producing half a yard of coarse sacking.

"All right," observed Mr. Bodkin; "I'm not particular. Don't touch your face," he whispered, as the Jew left the yard, "and instead of using that rascal's soap and water, rub some more of this mixture over your hands, which I observed were getting white again. While you do, I'll pump, and you do the same by me. That's why I asked for a wash."

Truly, Mr. Bodkin had the eye of a hawk. Nothing escaped his observation. Indeed, while we were pretending to dry our faces, he

silently drew my attention to a little comedy which was going on in an outhouse on the other side of the pump. The windows had been blackened with some preparation, but one had been broken, and through the aperture we could see our host filling two large bottles from a cask. When he had done this, he went to a cupboard and brought forth a cup, from which he took some white powder, which he inserted with an iron spoon into the mouths of the bottles. They immediately bubbled over with froth.

"Poison?" I whispered nervously.

"No," replied Mr. Bodkin, *sotto voce*; "carbonate of soda. Now, watch."

The Jew having corked the bottles with a mallet, again went to the cupboard and brought forth a bundle of labels, which, by the strong light proceeding from the open door opposite to our coign of observation, we readily perceived bore the well-known red triangle of Bass.

"Villain!" muttered Mr. Bodkin. "He's faked up some Belgian beer, and now he's adorning the bottles with forgeries made in Germany. If we hadn't other fish to fry, I'd make him pay for this. Come inside, and once more mum's the word."

Mr. Jacob Breithofer had arranged our

meal on one of his rough deal tables, and a more uninviting repast I never sat down to. A ragged piece of cow-beef was flanked by a bit of cheese, which would have served with distinction as a paving stone, and some attenuated sausages were guarded on either side by the famous bottles with their deceptive labels. The *ménu* was completed by the presence of some pickled cabbage and a half loaf of black bread, such as Belgian cabmen feed their horses with.

Mr. Breithofer observed, "It's lucky you haf come now bevore the navigatorz haf von the vorks returned. They are zo greezy." We were trying our best with the unsavoury food when my companion stopped the landlord from opening the beer.

"Gott in himmel!" cried the Jew, "vat vill you? This bier is to me consigned by the great Bass-and-Bass himself. It is prachtfol."

At this lie Mr. Bodkin lost his temper. He jumped up from his seat, and approached the Jew, with wrath in his eyes and danger in his fists. Mr. Breithofer stepped back in terror. The detective recollected himself.

"I'm not going to harm you, scoundrel," he said, "but a word in your ear. Bend your head."

The landlord tremblingly obeyed. What Mr. Bodkin whispered I do not to this hour know. All that he would tell me afterwards was that, by a flash of memory, he had brought back the landlord's identity. The Jew shook in every limb, and murmured, "Pardon! pardon! pardon! Wait but three minutes and you shall be satisfied." Evidently in an agony of fright, he cleared the board of its wretched fare, and in less time than it takes to record the fact we were enjoying a saddle of prime Ardennes mutton, a brace of partridges, both cold, and a bottle of Affenthaler which would not have been despised at the Hôtel de Russie of Frankfort.

"They were ordered for a great lot who is expected here to-day," he said, apologetically to Mr. Bodkin; "but I gan refuse you nothink."

"I know all about that," observed Mr. Bodkin. "Now for a liqueur glass of your best brandy, and fill this flask with the same, and while you are doing so let me have another word in your ear, which ought to be nailed to the lintel of your door-post. My friend smokes; give him a good cigar."

The Jew pressed a couple of Regalias into my hand.

"Go outside, mate," said Mr. Bodkin to

me. "I'll be with you in a trice." I obeyed him, and, sitting in the sunlight on the bench by the portal, marvelled at my associate's remarkable knowledge of men and things. Mr. Bodkin did not keep me waiting long. He came out apparently well satisfied, for he was snuffing copiously, accompanied by the cringing landlord. His last words to the latter were, "Remember, one word from *me* means a lifer for *you*."

Then he turned on his heel, and we left the Grand Hotel without even saying farewell to the shivering wretch, who poured out benedictions on our head till we were out of hearing.

"A lucky chance!" observed Mr. Bodkin, as we plodded over the sandy thoroughfare, "a very lucky chance! I'd not have known my man but for one thing."

"What was that?" I asked.

"When he was going to uncork those precious bottles, in lifting the first his rolled-up shirt sleeve fell back to the elbow, and I knew the mark of the beast."

"What mark?" I inquired, amazed.

"Never mind," answered the detective contentedly; "it was there on his forearm, and will be till he swings, as I should say he must do sooner or later. Another link in

the chain is forged, for he has, under pressure, confirmed my information in every particular. Don't ask me any questions."

"Only one," I put in after a pause. "Who is the great lord whom he is expecting? Is he Mr. Barbican?"

Mr. Bodkin gave a contemptuous grunt.

"Really, my friend," he said, "your wits do not brighten when the pinch comes. No," he added more kindly, "he is not, nor is he Mr. Barbican, nor even Mr. Thorpe, nor even his father-in-law, Baron Breckstein. That thief of a landlord does not know himself, but *I* do from the information which I extorted from him. He is the Grand Duke. But we must be nearing the cavern of the Gripeau, for there, evidently, is the new cutting of which the unlucky J. J. spoke."

He pointed to a great dark gash in the hillside as a bugle sounded. "Hallo! what does this mean?" he exclaimed. And he pointed to hundreds of men hurrying in our direction as fast as their legs could carry them, shouting, laughing, and chaffing, all evidently in excellent humour with themselves and the world in general. At the same time the thud of the pumping machine audibly slackened, and though it still continued to beat time, it was evidently at



very low pressure. Mr. Bodkin repeated his query, "What does this mean? Has the company gone broke, or has the machinery broken down?"

At this moment the leading members of the crowd had met us. Mr. Bodkin singled out one, without doubt an Englishman, and stopping him, for the third time put his question, "What does this mean?" The Englishman, who was certainly in a great hurry, replied, "Oh! you must be a new hand, mate. It means this, that to-day is the birthday of Baron Breckstein, the chairman of the railway company. He's given us a half-holiday, pays wages just the same, and is taking the lot of us to a great fête, for which he stands Sam in the Zoo at Liège. You'd better come too." Without waiting for a reply, however, he hurried towards the hut village.

"By St. Athanasius!" cried Mr. Bodkin, "the time and place are well chosen! The Baron is deeper than the Pacific Ocean. In half an hour the place will be deserted."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.*

MR. BODKIN appeared for the moment to be quite nonplussed by the condition of affairs. He pulled out his watch, and said regretfully, "Two o'clock. We've a couple of hours before us. Let's go into that wood yonder, and wait till this crowd is out of the way. When it's gone we can reconnoitre. I must say that it's been beautifully planned. Everything on the quiet and no one by."

We sat down under the beeches from which the mast was falling in liberal showers. Mr. Bodkin picked up a handful of the triformed nuts and gravely ate the kernels without saying a word, as he surveyed the throng of men and boys, and even women, hurrying past us some fifty yards from the wood. When the last straggler had disappeared, he drew from his pocket a pencil copy of the charcoal sketch which the unhappy J. J. had made of the cavern of the Gripeau and its surroundings.

"Now, observe," he said to me presently, "there's only one entrance. There's no bolt hole, so that any one entering the grotto is fixed like a pigeon in a trap, and two resolute sentries outside could block the exit against a score of enemies within. Now, what is the foeman's plan? Does he expect to bottle us, or does he anticipate that we shall try to bottle him? What's your opinion?"

"My opinion," I replied, "is that the foeman, as you call him, knows nothing of our movements."

"What!" echoed Mr. Bodkin, "knows nothing of our movements! Do you mean that?"

"Even so," I answered, "and if your surmise be correct that J. J. was a double-handed traitor, he was shot by Conrad Breckstein to prevent his giving information to the other side."

"By St. Augustine!" cried Mr. Bodkin, "you're right, Mr. Holdsworth! I wouldn't have given you credit for such perspicacity, I wouldn't indeed, but I'm certain that you've hit the bull's-eye this time. Yes," he continued rapidly, "that's it, and unwittingly they have played into our hands by getting rid of the workmen to-day. I'll wager that even the custodian of the grotto

and his assistants have been packed off to Liège. You see the cavern is not much of a show place as yet. It was only discovered quite recently when that cutting was made, and the railway company have been keeping the find as dark as possible in order to boom it when the new line's completed; of course, there have been a few tourists, but it's not easy to reach as yet. There's only one thing I can't explain, and that is why your friend, Mr. Thorpe, should have been asked by his brother-in-law to meet him in this region. Evidently the freshet has been got under or the pumping engine would not have been slowed down even on the Baron's birthday. Can't you suggest some reason for Conrad Breckstein's appointment with his brother-in-law?"

"No," I said, "I can't, unless, and it seems to me to be wildly improbable, Conrad Breckstein, reckless of every obstacle standing in the way of his devotion to the Princess of Zarinthia, conceived the idea of holding Dick Thorpe as a hostage to defeat the ends of his own father, who, devoted to his daughter, would do anything to preserve her happiness."

Mr. Bodkin shook his head, and said, "No, I think you're wide of the target this time. Hostages passed away in civil warfare

centuries ago. We don't deal in hostages now. Blackmail is more potent——”

“Conrad Breckstein couldn't blackmail Dick Thorpe,” I exclaimed warmly.

“I didn't say he could,” remarked my companion placidly, “but there must be a reason, a potent reason. Here is an outcast from his family, a rebel to his father, yet a devoted adherent to a banished dynasty, who is bold enough to make an appointment with a man with whom he is, notwithstanding his affinity by marriage, utterly out of sympathy.”

“Breckstein,” I said, “is, as you know and as I know to my cost, perfectly unscrupulous. He would not fear God, man, or devil, could he thwart the designs of the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen.”

“Stop!” cried Mr. Bodkin, more excitedly than I had ever seen him make an ejaculation before; “that's where it is. His sister, Mrs. Thorpe, and he are good friends, eh?”

“A loving brother and a loving sister,” I replied.

Mr. Bodkin threw a handful of beech mast at an unoffending squirrel. “I've got it!” he ejaculated. “Conrad Breckstein—ignorant as I was of this outing to Liège—intended to make a tool of his brother-in-law.”

“How so?” I asked.

“Mr. Thorpe,” rejoined the detective, “has full power over the men employed here. Conrad Breckstein would tell him that a deliberately planned attempt at robbery and perhaps murder would be made at the cavern of the Gripeau to-day. He would not ask him for money or police or weapons. He would simply ask him to come with him here to-day, and by means of the men under his control suppress the outrage. He would give him eloquent proof. Would Mr. Thorpe refuse his appeal?”

“No,” I answered, astounded at Mr. Bodkin’s astuteness, “for Dick Thorpe is an English gentleman.”

“I knew it,” cried the detective. “One last question—did Mr. Thorpe know of this fête at Liège?”

“I am sure that he didn’t,” I answered, “or he would have mentioned the matter to me at Namur.”

“Now I am certain,” chuckled Mr. Bodkin; “the engineer of the line, the son-in-law of the chairman of the company, is kept in the dark. Why? Because they did not trust his wife. It’s in a nutshell now. We’ll have a drop of that rascal’s brandy, and then to the cavern.”

He handed me his flask.

"Are we to be rabbits or ferrets?" I asked, after taking a pull.

"Both," he said, "but primarily foxes, and take to the earth." He lifted the flask to his lips, but let it fall ere it reached them.

"Drop down flat," he said in a hoarse whisper, pointing to the road over which the navvies had been hurrying but a little while before. I did so, and saw two forms hurrying furtively along—the one a bearded man of considerable stature, the other a boy. Both wore grey blouses and those ungainly felt slippers which the Belgian artisan often substitutes for the customary sabot when the weather is fine. They were gesticulating earnestly with their hands, but though they were within hearing distance, not a sound of their conversation reached my ears. Yet they must have had some topic of weighty discussion, or they would not have halted every few yards, looked stealthily around, and not have begun again till they were satisfied that they were not being watched. The air was perfectly still, only really disturbed by the subdued hum of the pumping engine; yet the talk of these two wayfarers was unheard, while the soft cooing of the wood pigeons in the trees was as distinct,

though as gentle, as the ripple of a summer sea. I could neither understand this aural phenomenon, nor Mr. Bodkin's evident curiosity. What could these two peasants, probably discussing a bird-singing match, have to do with us?

"I can't hear a word that they are saying," I said softly to my comrade as we lay prone among the leaves and the beech mast.

"You're not likely to do so," he answered in the same key. "Don't you see that they are talking on their fingers?"

"Do you know them?" I whispered.

"Yes," he replied, "and so do you—look again."

I shook my head.

"I do," he observed. "The tall man is Conrad Breckstein, and the boy is that smart little fellow, Kritz."



## CHAPTER XX.

### *IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.*

THE discovery of the detective filled me with apprehension. What could there be in common between Kritz, the devoted attendant of the deceased Jackson, and Conrad Breckstein, who had presumably shot the Anglo-Belgian detective? I put the question to my companion. He smiled grimly, and said—

“You are, I perceive, notwithstanding your natural astuteness, somewhat deficient in putting two and two together. I am now certain that Kritz was not the faithful slave of J. J., but an employé of Conrad Breckstein, and instructed by him to keep a watch on the suspected traitor. But, look! they have turned into that thicket on the left. Let us keep under the shade of the trees and be first inside the cavern. It's a pity that grass won't grow under beeches, for a fallen twig might betray our

presence when cracking under our tread over the leaves. Believe me that for silent progression there is nothing like turf. Stoop as low as you can, and follow me to that clump of hollies."

I obeyed his order, and after a walk, or rather crawl—for every few yards Mr. Bodkin fell on all-fours, and I imitated his example—we came to the dry, sandy bed of the stream, which had undoubtedly been blocked out from the other end of the cavern to meet the requirements of Dick Thorpe's new line. We proceeded up the disused water-course till we came to a great white cliff, with brambles and toad-flax hanging to its side. Immediately before us yawned a great black aperture as large as the entrance under the port-cullis-gate of Windsor Castle.

"Steady," whispered Mr. Bodkin. "We must know who are the first arrivals."

He pulled a small bull's-eye lantern out of his breast, and, having lighted the candle, boldly entered the grotto, still by way of the dry bed of the stream. The feeble rays of the lantern revealed but dimly the superb scene which the interior of the cave presented.

Long stalactites of glittering whiteness

were ranged on either side in slim and snowy pillars, while from the roof similar formations hung in weird and fantastic forms, now in star-like clusters, now in icy shafts, and now in great bosses, which might have been fashioned by the chisel of the sculptor.

"Lovely!" muttered Mr. Bodkin. "It reminds me of a Virgin Cathedral."

Not a sound could be heard except the faint crush of our feet over the fine white sand. We were, without doubt, the first arrivals.

The grotto appeared at a rough guess to be about a hundred yards wide, though it narrowed here and widened there, and I should say it extended for nearly a quarter of a mile, when our progress was barred by a massive wall of stone masonry. In front of it were ranged a number of small barrels partly covered with tarpaulin.

"The dynamite!" whispered Mr. Bodkin. "Evidently the custodian has slipped off to Liège with the others. Now, where shall we hide? That looks like a convenient place."

He pointed in the semi-darkness to a great pale mass which to my fancy resembled a white dromedary such as I had once seen in

a circus at Margate. It lay on the right of the stream-bed, which had here spread itself out to the dimensions of a very respectable pond, and was some six feet lower than the course along which we had arrived. We ascended the bank and approached the dromedary. My idea was not far-fetched, for Mr. Bodkin observed, "It looks like a petrified camel." But when we reached this curious formation we found that it was not more than three inches thick, and semi-opaque, for before getting to the opposite side of the brutelike screen the detective put the lantern down, and, crossing over to the other side, made sure that the rays penetrated, though but weakly, the dromedary's body. "That means," said Mr. Bodkin, "douse the glim! We'll entrust the lighting arrangements to our friends. Before we cut off the gas, take a good look round. Note that on the other bank there is another petrified animal more like a lion than a camel, and that there is a big heap of sand close by, no doubt made by the workmen who built that wall. I wish we'd had a look at the reservoir, but it's too late now. Keep your hand on your barking-iron."

So saying, he turned the mask over the bull's-eye, and we were immediately plunged

into total darkness. I was not a bit afraid, but a nervous excitement seized me as the light went out, and I trembled violently, so violently indeed that Mr. Bodkin must have felt my body shaking on the stones, for he put the brandy flask into my hand. "Have a swig," he whispered, "while I take a pinch of snuff." His voice was absolutely without a tremor. The spirit restored me to myself. The silence was awful, and the air was piercingly cold. Under any circumstances the position of being imprisoned in the discomfort of semi-sepulture would have been far from pleasant, but situated as we were, with the almost absolute certainty of a struggle for life, the tension was the most awful which I have ever experienced. I breathed hard, but Mr. Bodkin's respiration was quite inaudible.

I do not know how long we waited as quiet as cats watching for mice, when my companion gave me a push with his right foot, "Some one is coming," he whispered. A shuffling of footsteps might be heard coming towards us, and a faint light shone through the dromedary's flanks. But the new-comers were not, to all appearance, desirous of concealing themselves. On the contrary, a loud voice, which I recognised as

that of Mr. Barbican, exclaimed some fifty yards off—

“I prophesy that this cave of the Gripeau will become one of the best-known grottoes in Europe.”

“It ought to be,” said another voice, with a chuckle, “if historical events go for anything.”

“Paul Délaz,” muttered Mr. Barbican.

“Oh! uncle, dear uncle,” put in a third voice, and one which made my heart beat like a steam engine, for it was my own Hetty who spoke, “let us turn back; I do not like this cave. I would rather be out in the open air in the sunlight.”

“My dear niece,” replied Mr Barbican harshly, “you know why you are here: because little pitchers have long ears; because you were indiscreet enough to reveal certain facts to the enemies of my employers; because you can swear to the secret marks on the emeralds to the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen.”

“Bravo!” said Paul Délaz.

“You are unmanly,” pleaded Hetty; “you force me to do that which my soul abhors, because of my devotion to my sweet Princess.”

“I do nothing of the sort, Hetty,” replied

Mr. Barbican, with resolution. "I do so because I intend to leave this dirt-hole a millionaire. You have the case of jewels?"

"Yes, you coward!" answered Hetty angrily. "*I* have, because you were afraid to handle it—you, or your precious friend, Monsieur Paul Délaz, who cheated you once and will cheat you again."

"I protest, mademoiselle," broke in Délaz. "I swear——"

"You would swear anything," said Hetty contemptuously. "If Harry Holdsworth were only here, you would not dare to make me your accomplice."

If Mr. Bodkin had not clapped one of his hands over my mouth, and clutched my arm with a grasp of iron with the other, I should there and then have posed as a hero of romance and—ruined everything.

"You allude," said Mr. Barbican coldly, "to a young man whom I picked out for his gross stupidity to be a willing tool in our hands. When I knew that the emeralds which my excellent friend Mr. Délaz had secured were forgeries, I said to myself, 'Only one man in the world is ass enough to sell the gems to the Grand Duke, and he is Henry Holdsworth.'"

Mr. Bodkin had again to restrain me by force.

Mr. Barbican went on—"I therefore pretended to encourage his attentions to you, and he fell into the pitfall. But when he, in his own asinine way, allowed himself to be robbed by that dare-devil Conrad Breckstein, I washed my hands of the simpleton. I sent him abroad with my confidential agent, Bodkin, to do a wild-goose chase in double harness."

Mr. Bodkin now grasped my arm with suppressed fury.

The jeweller went on—"I have said that Holdsworth is a donkey, but I may state that a greater gander than Bodkin does not exist. He is the quintessence of asinine conceit, and his detective qualities are as wanting as is in intrinsic value a Paris diamond. I only engaged him to throw dust in the eyes of suspicious enemies. Had you not betrayed me to our mutual friend Miss Janet Smith, *alias* the Princess of Zarinthia, there would have been no trouble. Eh, Délaz?"

"*Parfaitement,*" replied that villain. "Mademoiselle was indiscreet."

"I was not," said my Hetty hotly, "I was



true to my honour and my love, and so I ever will be."

I blessed my loyal-hearted sweetheart, and even the imperturbable Bodkin squeezed my hand sympathetically.

"Listen," said Délaz excitedly, "there are footsteps; the Grand Duke is coming."

"Alone?" asked Mr. Barbican.

"Alone? of course!" answered the scoundrel, "that was your stipulation, was it not?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Barbican, "he'll bring the money and bills with him."

"Good," observed Délaz, with a chuckle as before, "this will make a fine exchange office. Mademoiselle, have the case ready."

"He is not alone," said Mr. Barbican nervously.

"Pooh!" returned Délaz, "he is accompanied only by a boy with a torch."

The red glare from the flambeau enhanced the weirdness of the scene as the Grand Duke drew near, and myriad colours were reflected from the stalactites.

The potentate of Schleswig-Bohmerhausen halted and said—

"The gentlemen with the emeralds?"

Mr. Barbican and Délaz raised their hats.

"You have the jewels?" asked the Grand Duke.

"They are here," answered Mr. Barbican. "Hetty, the emeralds; give them to His Royal Highness."

Hetty handed him the morocco case, which the Grand Duke opened. The stones, in the glare of the torch and the candle which Délaz carried, gleamed like the eyes of a cobra. The Grand Duke clutched them eagerly.

"At last," he cried in German, "they are restored!"

With a fearful oath, Délaz sprang at his throat.

"Betrayed," he shrieked, "by Conrad Breckstein!"

The boy flung his torch away from him. It fell amid the barrels. There was a fearful thunderous roar, the cavern shook and crumbled with convulsive shocks, and a mighty rush of water swept me away as I caught hold of an inanimate form which I knew must be Hetty's. Then I remember no more of the tragedy of the Gripeau.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *"AUSPICIUM MELIORIS ÆVI."*

WHEN I opened my eyes again I was lying on a bed in an unfamiliar chamber, poorly furnished. I felt a horrible pain in each of my legs and a stiffness of body which prevented my moving without causing a thrill of agony to pass over me. A man was sitting by the bedside.

"Give me a drink," I said feebly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the man, "you've come round. Take this."

He held a glass of lemonade to my fevered lips.

"Dick Thorpe!" I murmured.

"Even so," he said. "You've had a narrow squeak."

"And Hetty," I asked, as eagerly as I could, "is she alive?"

"Yes," he answered, "you got her safely out of that dreadful cavern."

"I remember nothing about the matter,"

I said, with a feeble smile; "how did I manage it?"

"No one knows," he replied, "but you nearly lost your life in saving hers. You were found holding her up under the holly clump outside of the ruined cave. She has been taken to Brussels," he added.

"Where am I?" I inquired.

"At the Hôtel de la Gripeau," he said, "but if you go on well, we'll move you to-morrow."

"And Mr. Barbican?" I went on.

"Dead," he answered, "together with Paul Délaz, who shot Jackson, and my poor brother-in-law, who gave up his existence for a foolish cause. A kind of Porte St. Martin drama," he added, with an attempt at a smile.

"And Mr. Bodkin?" I asked. It was curious that I should have thought of Mr. Barbican before the trusty detective.

"Uninjured," said Thorpe, "and here he is! He had a miraculous escape when the cave blew up."

"Miraculous indeed," observed Mr. Bodkin, taking a pinch of snuff with his left hand as he held out his right to me. "Miraculous, too, was yours, Mr. Holdsworth. I think that the force of the released water, plentiful as when Moses struck the rock, must have

been the reason for my being shot out of the grotto like a bolt from a catapult. Now, don't ask any questions. You're too weak, but I'll relieve your peace of mind. Kritz is all right and in my service, the cavern of the Gripeau is a thing of the past, but the explosion, queerly enough, formed by the falling *débris*, twice as strong a barrier as the destroyed masonry."

"Quite true," observed Thorpe; "the reservoir went and swept away the entire village, barring this inn and the pumping station, but when once the flow of water was exhausted, we were enabled to block the Gripeau more firmly than ever with very little labour. It's a pity though, for that grotto would have been a great attraction to tourists."

"And the emeralds!" I ejaculated. "What about the emeralds?"

"They are once more," said Mr. Bodkin complacently, "in the hands of the rightful owner. When poor Conrad Breckstein impersonated the Grand Duke after stripping off that grey blouse in which we saw him, he made the greatest *coup* of his career. He had sworn to recover them for the Princess, and he stuck at nothing. They could hardly get the case out of his fingers, when they

found the body jammed in a cleft of the cave. He was, indeed, a good and faithful servant."

"But where was the Grand Duke?" I asked feverishly.

"Where Conrad had sent him—by means of, I regret to say, a forged telegram—Liège. The Grand Duke has since left Europe for a tour in the Soudan," said Dick Thorpe. "As Mr. Bodkin justly observed, he stuck at nothing. My father-in-law is broken-hearted, not at his sad death, but because the Hospodar has returned to Zarnovia."

"Returned to Zarnovia!" I cried.

"Yes," said Thorpe. "I wish poor Conrad had loved his family more and the golden-haired Princess less."

"How long, then, have I been lying here?" I asked incredulously.

"About two months," answered Mr. Bodkin, pointing to the window. "See, the early snow is falling; but we are all to go from Brussels to Zarnovia on the first of December to attend the re-coronation of the Hospodar."

"Bother the re-coronation of the Hospodar!" I exclaimed fretfully. "I want my Hetty."

"I thought you did," remarked Mr.

Bodkin, "and Miss Cameron is here. She has never left your side except when Mr. Thorpe took her place."

I felt a great gladness pass through my veins.

"But why," I asked peevishly, "did you tell me, Dick, that Hetty was in Brussels?"

"Because," replied Dick without a quiver, "my wife said that you mustn't be over-excited."

"Over-excited!" I exclaimed; "you have made me well again."

"Then," said Mr. Bodkin, opening the door, "here is your lady-doctor."

The kisses of my darling were on my brow, cheeks, and lips. All the medicine in the world could not have effected so complete a cure. I felt the new life-touch making me strong in my weakness.

"Mr. Holdsworth," observed Mr. Bodkin, "a few weeks ago I thought that you were booked for the churchyard; I am now certain that it is for the church."

Then he and Thorpe left my love to talk with me of the better future after the bitter past, and we knew that the sun would shine again.

## TWO EPILOGUES.

### EPILOGUE No. 1.

*[Extract from the letter of a Special Correspondent to the "Daily Telegraph."]*

“IN the Great Hall of the magnificent Schloss of Zarnovia, the capital of Zarinthia, a splendid sight might have been witnessed on the night of December 14th (Old Style), when the Hospodar of the principality was girdled by the Ban of the Zarinthian Marshes with the far-famed Emerald Circlet. By the august ruler's side stood his beautiful daughter, her golden locks shining like real ore in the noble effulgence of twenty thousand cressets held aloft by the representatives of the proudest people in the world. The Sovereign Prince (who but lately was an exile from the land of his illustrious forefathers), when the Ban had placed the glittering bauble on his person, drew his sword and shouted in a deep bass voice, ‘ I swear by the Ever Blessed Trinity



and these Holy Jewels to be true to my country, and to my dynasty!’ Then soul-stirring shouts went up and were repeated again and again, but it was observed by some that the Princess’s eyes were suffused with tears, and there were whispers in that vast assembly, ‘She does not forget Conrad Breckstein.’ If so, that devoted adherent to the apparently forlorn hope of the restored Hospodar has received a more heartfelt memorial than the beautiful marble cenotaph which is being erected over his remains in the grand old Cathedral. The inscription on it will be—

‘CONRAD BRECKSTEIN. Faith, Hope, and Love, but the greatest of all is Love. R.I.P.’

Among the Hospodar’s guests were several British citizens, namely, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Thorpe (the latter a sister of the late Baron Conrad Breckstein), Miss Henrietta Cameron, and Mr. Henry Holdsworth, who has been decorated with the Order of the Golden Vulture of Zarinthia for his devotion to the reigning family.”

EPILOGUE No. 2.

[*Extract from the “Daily Mail.”*]

“AT St. Peter’s, Eaton Square, there was celebrated yesterday the marriage of Mr.

Henry Holdsworth and Miss Henrietta Cameron, niece and heiress of the late Mr. Barbican, the enterprising expert in precious stones, who so unfortunately lost his life when visiting the cave of Gripeau on the day when the unhappy and unexplained explosion of dynamite occurred. The bride was given away by Baron Breckstein, the famous financier, and the best man was Mr. Richard Thorpe, the eminent railway contractor, who, though a married man, insisted in acting in that capacity. The service was performed by the Vicar, assisted by the Rev. Joshua Jenkins. There were no bridesmaids, but the full choral service was under the direction of Mr. Bodkin, late of Scotland Yard, who will, we understand, shortly be licensed as a lay preacher by the Lord Bishop of London—an honour thoroughly deserved, for Mr. Bodkin is a Theologian second to none. The wedding breakfast was subsequently given at Verrey's Restaurant, when the health of the newly-wedded couple was proposed in a most humorous speech by Mr. Bernard, the well-known solicitor. 'I call upon you,' he said, 'to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom. May their joint lives be as richly green as have been their past

experiences—(laughter)—gems, set perhaps in the circle of commonplace circumstance, but none the less jewels as difficult to replace as were those historic stones, 'The Lost Emeralds of Zarinthia.' (Great applause.)"

THE END.

