

The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings

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1899

INTRODUCTION.

THAT a secret society, based upon the lines of similar institutions so notorious on the Continent during the last century, could ever have existed in the London of our day may seem impossible. Such a society, however, not only did exist, but through the instrumentality of a woman of unparalleled capacity and genius, obtained a firm footing. A century ago the Brotherhood of the Seven Kings was a name hardly whispered without horror and fear in Italy, and now, by the fascinations and influence of one woman, it began to accomplish fresh deeds of unparalleled daring and subtlety in London. By the wide extent of its scientific resources, and the impregnable secrecy of its organisations, it threatened to become, a formidable menace to society, as well as a source of serious anxiety to the authorities of the law. It is to the courtesy of Mr. Norman Head that we are indebted for the subject-matter of the following hitherto unpublished revelations.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEVEN KINGS.

I.

AT THE EDGE OF THE CRATER.

TOLD BY NORMAN HEAD.

IT was in the year 1894 that the first of the remarkable events which I am about to give to the world occurred. They found me something of a philosopher and a recluse, having, as I thought, lived my life and done with the active part of existence. It is true that I was young, not more than thirty-five years of age, but in the ghastly past I had committed a supreme error, and because of that paralyzing experience I had left the bustling world and found my solace in the scientist's laboratory and the philosopher's study.

Ten years before these stories begin, when in Naples studying biology, I fell a victim to the wiles and fascinations of a beautiful Italian. A scientist of no mean

attainments herself, with beauty beyond that of ordinary mortals, she had appealed not only to my head, but also to my heart. Dazzled by her beauty and intellect, she led me where she would. Her aims and ambitions, which in the false glamour she threw over them I thought the loftiest in the world, became also mine. She introduced me to the men of her set Ñ I was quickly in the toils, and on a night never to be forgotten, I took part in a grotesque and horrible ceremony, and became a member of her Brotherhood.

It was called the Brotherhood of the Seven Kings, and dated its origin from one of the secret societies of the Middle Ages. In my first enthusiasm it seemed to me to embrace all the principles of true liberty. Katherine was its chief and queen. Almost immediately after my initiation, however, I made an appalling discovery. Suspicion pointed to the beautiful Italian as the instigator, if not the author, of a most terrible crime. None of the details could be brought home to her, but there was little doubt that she was its moving spring. Loving her passionately as I then did, I tried to close my intellect against the all too conclusive evidence of her guilt. For a time I succeeded, but when I was ordered myself to take part in a transaction both dishonourable and treacherous, my eyes were opened. Horror seized me, and I fled to England to place myself under the protection of its laws.

Ten years went by, and the past was beginning to fade. It was destined to be recalled to me with startling vividness.

When a young man at Cambridge I had studied physiology, but never qualified myself as a doctor, having independent means ; but in my laboratory in the vicinity of Regent's Park I worked at biology and physiology for the pure love of these absorbing sciences.

I was busily engaged on the afternoon of the 3rd of August, 1894, when Mrs. Kenyon, an old friend, called to see me. She was shown into my study, and I went to her there. Mrs. Kenyon was a widow, but her son, a lad of about twelve years of age, had, owing to the unexpected death of a relative, just come in for a large fortune and a title. She took the seat I offered her.

"It is too bad of you, Norman," she said; "it is months since you have been near me. Do you intend to forget your old friends?"

"I hope you will forgive me," I answered; "you know how busy I always am."

“You work too hard,” she replied. “Why a man with your brains and opportunities for enjoying life wishes to shut himself up in the way you do, I cannot imagine.”

“I am quite happy as I am, Mrs. Kenyon,” I replied; “why, therefore, should I change? By the way, how is Cecil?”

“I have come here to speak about him. You know, of course, the wonderful change in his fortunes?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“He has succeeded to the Kairn property, and is now Lord Kairn. There is a large rent-roll and considerable estates. You know, Norman, that Cecil has always been a most delicate boy.”

“I hoped you were about to tell me that he was stronger,” I replied.

“He is, and I will explain how in a moment. His life is a most important one. As Lord Kairn much is expected of him. He has not only, under the providence of God, to live, but by that one little life he has to keep a man of exceedingly bad character out of a great property. I allude to Hugh Doncaster. Were Cecil to die, Hugh would be Lord Kairn. You have already doubtless heard of his character?”

“I know the man well by repute,” I said.

I thought you did. His disappointment and rage at Cecil succeeding to the title are almost beyond bounds. Rumours of his malevolent feelings towards the child have already reached me. I am told that he is now in London, but his life, like yours, is more or less mysterious. I thought it just possible, Norman, that you, as an old friend, might be able to get me some particulars with regard to his whereabouts.”

“Why do you want to know?” I asked.

“I feel a strange uneasiness about him; something which I cannot account for. Of course, in these enlightened days he would not attempt the child’s life, but I should be more comfortable if I were assured that he were nowhere in Cecil’s vicinity.”

“But the man can do nothing to your boy!” I said. “Of course, I will find out what I can, but ÑÑ”

Mrs. Kenyon interrupted me.

“Thank You. It is a relief to know that you will help me. Of course, there is no real danger; but I am a widow, and Cecil is only a child. Now, I must tell you about his health. He is almost quite well. The most marvellous resurrection has taken place. For the last two months he has been under the care of that extraordinary woman, *Mme. Koluchy*. She has worked miracles in his case, and now to complete the cure she is sending him to the Mediterranean. He sails to-morrow night under the care of Dr. Fietta. I cannot bear parting with him, but it is for his good, and *Mme. Koluchy* insists that a sea voyage is indispensable.”

“But won’t you accompany him?” I asked.

“I am sorry to say that is impossible. My eldest girl, Ethel, is about to be married, and I cannot leave her on the eve of her wedding; but Cecil will be in good hands. Dr. Fietta is a capital fellow Ñ I have every faith in him.”

“Where are they going?”

“To Cairo. They sail to-morrow night in the *Hydaspes*.”

“Cairo is a fearfully hot place at this time of year. Are you quite sure that it is wise to send a delicate lad like Cecil there in August?”

“Oh, he will not stay. He sails for the sake of the voyage, and will come back by the return boat. The voyage is, according to *Mme. Koluchy*, to complete the cure. That marvellous woman has succeeded where the medical profession gave little hope. You have heard of her, of course?”

“I am sick of her very name,” I replied; “one hears it everywhere. She has bewitched London with her impostures and quackery.”

“There is no quackery about her, Norman. I believe her to be the cleverest woman in England. There are authentic accounts of her wonderful cures which cannot be contradicted. There are even rumours that she is able to restore youth and beauty by her arts. The whole of society is at her feet, and it is whispered that even Royalty are among her patients. Of course, her fees are enormous, but

look at the results! Have you ever met her?”

“Never. Where does she come from? Who is she?”

“She is an Italian, but she speaks English perfectly. She has taken a house which is a perfect palace in Welbeck Street.”

“And who is Dr. Fietta?”

“A medical man who assists Madame in her treatments. I have just seen him. He is charming, and devoted to Cecil. Five o’clock! I had no idea it was so late. I must be going. You will let me know when you hear any news of Mr. Doncaster? Come and see me soon.”

I accompanied my visitor to the door, and then, returning to my study, sat down to resume the work I had been engaged in when I was interrupted.

But Mrs. Kenyon’s visit had made me restless. I knew Hugh Doncaster’s character well. Reports of his evil ways now and then agitated society, but the man had hitherto escaped the stern arm of justice. Of course, there could be no real foundation for Mrs. Kenyon’s fears, but I felt that I could sympathize with her. The child was young and delicate; if Doncaster could injure him without discovery, he would not scruple to do so. As I thought over these things, a vague sensation of coming trouble possessed me. I hastily got into my evening dress, and having dined at my club, found myself at half-past ten in a drawing-room in Grosvenor Square. As I passed on into the reception-rooms, having exchanged a few words with my hostess, I came across Dufrayer, a lawyer, and a special friend of mine. We got into conversation. As we talked, and my eyes glanced idly round the groups of smartly dressed people, I noticed where a crowd of men were clustering round and paying homage to a stately woman at the farther end of the room. A diamond star flashed in her dusky hair. On her neck and arms diamonds also glittered. She had an upright bearing and a regal appearance. Her rosy lips were smiling. The marked intelligence and power of her face could not fail to arrest attention, even in the most casual observer. At the first glance I felt that I had seen her before, but could not tell when or where.

“Who is that woman?” I asked of my companion.

“My dear fellow, he replied, with an amused smile, “don’t you know? That is the great *Mme. Koluchy*, the rage of the season, the great specialist, the great

consultant. London is mad about her. She has only been here ten minutes, and look, she is going already. They say she has a dozen engagements every night.”

Mme. Koluchy began to move towards the door, and, anxious to get a nearer view, I also passed rapidly through the throng. I reached the head of the stairs before she did, and as she went by looked her full in the face. Her eyes met mine. Their dark depths seemed to read me through. She half smiled, half paused as if to speak, changed her mind, made a stately inclination of her queenly head, and went slowly downstairs. For a moment I stood still, there was a ringing in my ears, and my heart was beating to suffocation. Then I hastily followed her. When I reached the pavement *Mme. Koluchy's* carriage stopped the way. She did not notice me, but I was able to observe her. She was bending out and talking eagerly to some one. The following words fell on my ear:

“It is all right. They sail to-morrow evening.”

The man to whom she spoke made a reply which I could not catch, but I had seen his face. He was Hugh Doncaster.

Mme. Koluchy's carriage rolled away, and I hailed a hansom. In supreme moments we think rapidly. I thought quickly then.

“Where to?” asked the driver.

“No. 140, Earl's Terrace, Kensington,” I called out. I sat back as I spoke. The horror of past memories was almost paralyzing me, but I quickly pulled myself together. I knew that I must act, and act quickly. I had just seen the Head of the Brotherhood of the seven Kings. *Mme. Koluchy*, changed in much since I last saw her, was the woman who had wrecked my heart and life ten years ago in Naples.

With my knowledge of the, past, I was well aware that where this woman appeared victims fell. Her present victim was a child. I must save that child, even if my own life were the penalty. She had ordered the boy abroad. He was to sail to-morrow with an emissary of hers. She was in league with Doncaster. If she could get rid of the boy, Doncaster would doubtless pay her a fabulous sum. For the working of her she above all things wanted money. Yes, without doubt the lad's life was in the gravest danger, and I had not a moment to lose. The first thing was to communicate with the mother, and if possible put a stop to the intended voyage.

I arrived at the house, flung open the doors. of the hansom, and ran up the steps. Here unexpected news awaited me. The servant who answered my summons said that Mrs. Kenyon had started for Scotland by the night mail Ñ she had received a telegram announcing the serious illness of her eldest girl. On getting it she had started for the north, but would not reach her destination until the following evening.

“Is Lord Kairn in?” I asked.

“No, sir,” was the reply. “My mistress did not like to leave him here alone, and he has been sent over to *Mme. Koluchy’s*, 100, Welbeck Street. Perhaps you are not aware, sir, that his lordship sails to-morrow evening for Cairo?”

“Yes, I know all about that,” I replied “and now, if you will give me your mistress’s address, I shall be much obliged to you.”

The man supplied it. I entered my hansom again. For a moment it occurred to me that I would send a telegram to intercept Mrs. Kenyon on her rapid journey north, but I finally made up my mind not to do so. The boy was already in the enemy’s hands, and I felt sure that I could now only rescue him by guile. I returned home, having already made up my mind how to act. I would accompany Cecil and Dr. Fietta to Cairo.

At eleven o’clock on the following morning I had taken my berth in the *Hydaspes*, and at nine that evening was on board. I caught a momentary glimpse of young Lord Kairn and his attendant, but in order to avoid explanations kept out of their way. It was not until the following morning, when the steamer was well down Channel, that I made my appearance on deck, where I at once saw the boy sitting at the stern in a chair. Beside him was a lean, middle-aged man wearing a pair of pince-nez. He looked every inch a foreigner, with his pointed beard, waxed moustache, and deep-set, beady eyes. As I sauntered across the deck to where they were sitting, Lord Kairn looked up and instantly recognised me.

“Mr. Head!” he exclaimed, jumping from his chair, “you here? I am very glad to see you.”

“I am on my way to Cairo, on business,” I said, shaking the boy warmly by the hand.

“To Cairo? Why, that is where we are going; but you never told mother you were coming, and she saw you the day before yesterday. It was such a pity that mother had to rush off to Scotland so suddenly; but last night, just before we sailed, there came a telegram telling us that Ethel was better. As mother had to go away, I went to *Mme. Koluchy’s* for the night. I love going there. She has a lovely house, and she is so delightful herself. And this is Dr. Fietta, who has come with me.” As the boy added these words Dr. Fietta came forward and peered at me through his pince-nez. I bowed, and he returned my salutation.

“This is an extraordinary coincidence, Dr. Fietta!” I exclaimed. “Cecil Kenyon happens to be the son of one of my greatest friends. I am glad to see him looking so well. Whatever *Mme. Koluchy’s* treatment has been, it has had a marvellous effect. I am told that you are fortunate enough to be the participator in her wonderful secrets and cures.”

“I have the honour of assisting *Mme. Koluchy*,” he replied, with a strong foreign accent; “but may I take the liberty of inquiring who gave you the information about myself?”

“It was Mrs. Kenyon,” I answered. “She told me all about you the other day.”

“She knew, then, that you were going to be a fellow-passenger of her son’s?”

“No, for I did not know myself. An urgent telegram calling me to Egypt arrived that evening, and I only booked my passage yesterday. I am fortunate in having the honour of meeting so distinguished a savant as yourself. I have heard much about *Mme. Koluchy’s* marvellous occult powers, but I suppose the secrets of her success are very jealously guarded. The profession, of course, pooh-pooh her, I know, but if one may credit all one hears, she possesses remedies undreamt-of in their philosophy.”

“It is quite true, Mr. Head. As a medical man myself, I can vouch for her capacity, and, unfettered by English professional scrupulousness, I appreciate it. *Mme. Koluchy* and I are proud of our young friend here, and hope that the voyage will complete his cure, and fit him for the high position he is destined to occupy.”

The voyage flew by. Fietta was an intelligent man, and his scientific attainments were considerable. But for my knowledge of the terrible past my fears might have slumbered, but as it was they were always present with me, and the

moment all too quickly arrived when suspicion was to be plunged into certainty.

On the day before we were due at Malta, the wind sprang up and we got into a choppy sea. When I had finished breakfast I went to Cecil's cabin to see how he was. He was just getting up, and looked pale and unwell.

"There is a nasty sea on," I said, "but the captain says we shall be out of it in an hour or so."

"I hope we shall," he answered, "for it makes me feel squeamish, but I daresay I shall be all right when I get on deck. Dr. Fietta has given me something to stop the sickness, but it has not me had much effect."

"I do not know anything that really stops sea-sickness," I answered; "but what has he done?"

"Oh: a curious thing, Mr. Head. He pricked my arm with a needle on a syringe, and squirted something in. He says it is a certain cure for sea-sickness. Look," said the child, baring his arm, "that is where he did it."

I examined the mark closely. It had evidently been made with a hypodermic injection needle.

"Did Dr. Fietta tell you what he put into your arm?" I asked.

"Yes, he said it was morphia."

"Where does he keep his needle?"

"In his trunk there under his bunk. I shall be dressed directly, and will come on deck."

I left the cabin and went up the companion. The doctor was pacing to and fro on the hurricane-deck. I approached him.

"Your charge has not been well," I said, "I have just seen him. He tells me you have give him a hypodermic of morphia."

He turned round and gave me a quick glance of uneasy fear.

“Did Lord Kairn tell you so?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Mr. Head, it is the very best cure for sea-sickness. I have found it most efficacious.”

“Do you think it wise to give a child morphia?” I asked.

“I do not discuss my treatment with an unqualified man,” he replied brusquely, turning away as he spoke. I looked after him, and as he disappeared down the deck my fears became certainties. I determined, come what would, to find out what he had given the boy. I knew only too well the infinite possibilities of that dangerous little instrument, a hypodermic syringe.

As the day wore on the sea moderated, and at five o’clock it was quite calm again, a welcome change to the passengers, who, with the permission of the captain, had arranged to give a dance that evening on deck. The occasion was one when ordinary scruples must fade out of sight. Honour in such a mission, as I had set myself must give place to the watchful zeal of the detective. I was determined to take advantage of the dance to explore Dr. Fietta’s cabin. The doctor was fond of dancing, and as soon as I saw that he and Lord Kairn were well engaged, I descended the companion, and went to their cabin. I switched on the electric light, and, dragging the trunk from beneath the bunk, hastily opened it. It was unlocked and only secured by straps. I ran my hand rapidly through the contents, which were chiefly clothes, but tucked in one corner I found a case, and, pulling it out, opened it. Inside lay the delicate little hypodermic syringe which I had come in search of.

I hurried up to the light and examined it. Smeared round the inside of the glass, and adhering to the bottom of the little plunger, was a whitish, gelatinous-looking substance. This was no ordinary hypodermic solution. It was half-liquefied gelatine such as I knew so well as the medium for the cultivation of micro-organisms. For a moment I felt half-stunned. What infernal culture might it not contain?

Time was flying, and at any moment I might be discovered. I hastily slipped the syringe into my pocket, and closing the trunk, replaced it, and, switching off the electric light, returned to the deck. My temples were throbbing, and it was with difficulty I could keep my self-control. I made up my mind quickly. Fietta would

of course miss the syringe, but the chances were that he would not do so that night. As yet there was nothing apparently the matter with the boy, but might there not be flowing through his veins some poisonous germs of disease, which only required a period of incubation for their development?

At daybreak the boat would arrive at Malta. I would go on shore at once, call upon some medical man, and lay the case before him in confidence, in the hope of his having the things I should need in order to examine the contents of the syringe. If I found any organisms, I would take the law into my own hands, and carry the boy back to England by the next boat.

No sleep visited me that night, and I lay tossing to and fro in my bunk longing for daylight. At 6 a.m. I heard the engine-bell ring, and the screw suddenly slow down to half-speed. I leapt up and went on deck. I could see the outline of the rock-bound fortress and the lighthouse of St. Elmo looming more vividly every moment. As soon as we were at anchor and the gangway down, I hailed one of the little green boats and told the men to row me to the shore. I drove at once to the Grand Hotel in the Strada Reale, and asked the Italian guide the address of a medical man. He gave me the address of an English doctor who lived close by, and I went there at once to see him. It was now seven o'clock, and I found him up. I made my apologies for the early hour of my visit, put the whole matter before him, and produced the syringe. For a moment he was inclined to take my story with incredulity, but by degrees he became interested, and ended by inviting me to breakfast with him. After the meal we repaired to his consulting-room to make our investigations. He brought out his microscope, which I saw, to my delight, was of the latest design, and I set to work at once, while he watched me with evident interest. At last the crucial moment came, and I bent over the instrument and adjusted the focus on my preparation. My suspicions were only too well confirmed by which I had extracted what I saw. The substance from the syringe was a mass of micro-organisms, but of what nature I did not know. I had never seen any quite like them before. I drew back.

"I wish you would look at this," I said. "you tell me you have devoted considerable attention to bacteriology. Please tell me what you see."

Dr. Benson applied his eye to the instrument, regulating the focus for a few moments in silence, then he raised his head, and looked at me with a curious expression.

“Where did this culture come from?” he asked.

“From London, I presume,” I answered.

“It is extraordinary,” he said, with emphasis, “but there is no doubt whatever that these organisms are the specific germs of the very disease I have studied here so assiduously ; they are the micrococci of Mediterranean fever, the minute round or oval bacteria. They are absolutely characteristic.”

I jumped to my feet.

“Is that so?” I cried. The diabolical nature of the plot was only too plain. These germs injected into a patient would produce a fever which only occurs in the Mediterranean. The fact that the boy had been in the Mediterranean even for a short time would be a complete blind as to the way in which they obtained access to the body, as every one would think the disease occurred from natural causes.

“How long is the period of incubation?” I asked.

“About ten days,” replied Dr. Benson.

I extended my hand.

“You have done me an invaluable service,” I said.

“I may possibly be able to do you a still further service,” was his reply. “I have made Mediterranean fever the study of my life, and have, I believe, discovered an antitoxin for it. I have tried my discovery on the patients of the naval hospital with excellent results. The local disturbance is slight, and I have never found bad symptoms follow the treatment. If you will bring the boy to me I will administer the antidote without delay.”

I considered for a moment, then I said: “My position is a terrible one, and I am inclined to accept your proposition. Under the circumstances it is the only chance.”

“It is,” repeated Dr. Benson. “I shall be at your service whenever you need me.”

I bade him good-bye and quickly left the house.

It was now ten o'clock. My first object was to find Dr. Fietta, to speak to him boldly, and take the boy away by main force if necessary. I rushed back to the Grand Hotel, where I learned that a boy and a man, answering to the description of Dr. Fietta and Cecil, had breakfasted there, but had gone out again immediately afterwards. The Hydaspes I knew was to coal, and would not leave Malta before one o'clock. My only chance, therefore, was to catch them as they came on board. Until then I could do nothing. At twelve o'clock I went down to the quay and took a boat to the Hydaspes. Seeing no sign of Fietta and the boy on deck, I made my way at once to Lord Kairn's cabin. The door was open and the place in confusion—every vestige of baggage had disappeared. Absolutely at a loss to divine the cause of this unexpected discovery, I pressed the electric bell. In a moment a steward appeared.

"Has Lord Kairn left the ship?" I asked, my heart beating fast.

"I believe so, sir," replied the man. "I had orders to pack the luggage and send it on shore. It went about an hour ago."

I waited to hear no more. Rushing to my cabin, I began flinging my things pell-mell into my portmanteau. I was full of apprehension at this sudden move of Dr. Fietta's. Calling a steward who was passing to help me, I got my things on deck, and in a few moments had them in a boat and was making rapidly for the shore. I drove back at once to the Grand Hotel in the Strada Reale.

"Did the gentleman who came here to-day from, the Hydaspes, accompanied by a little boy, engage rooms for the night?" I asked of the proprietor in the bureau at the top of the stairs.

"No, sir," answered the man; "they breakfasted here, but did not return. I think they said they were going to the gardens of San Antonio."

For a minute or two I paced the hall in uncontrollable excitement. I was completely at a loss what step to take next. Then suddenly an idea struck me. I hurried down the steps and made my way to Cook's office.

"A gentleman of that description took two tickets for Naples by the Spartivento, a Rupertino boat, two hours ago," said the clerk, in answer to my inquiries. "She has started by now," he continued, glancing up at the clock.

"To Naples?" I cried. A sickening fear seized me. The very name of the hated

place struck me like a poisoned weapon.

“Is it too late to catch her?” I cried.

“Yes, sir, she has gone.”

“Then what is the quickest route by which I can reach Naples?”

“You can go by the Gingra, a P. & O. boat, to-night to Brindisi, and then overland. That is the quickest way now.”

I at once took my passage and left the office. There was not the least doubt what had occurred. Dr. Fietta had missed his syringe, and in consequence had immediately altered his plans. He was now taking the lad to the very fountain-head of the Brotherhood, where other means if necessary would be employed to put an end to his life.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, three days later, when, from the window of the railway carriage, I caught my first glimpse of the glow on the summit of Vesuvius. During the journey I had decided on my line of action. Leaving my luggage in the cloak-room I entered a carriage and began to visit hotel after hotel. For a long time I had no success. It was past eleven o'clock that night when, weary and heart-sick, I drew up at the Hotel Londres. I went to the concierge with my usual question, expecting the invariable reply, but a glow of relief swept over me when the man said:

“Dr. Fietta is out, sir, but the young man is in. He is in bed Ñ will you call to-morrow? What name shall I say?”

“I shall stay here,” I answered; “let me have a room at once, and have my bag taken to it. What is the number of Lord Kairn’s room?”

“Number forty-six. But he will be asleep, sir; you cannot see him now.”

I made no answer, but going quickly upstairs, I found the boy’s room. I knocked; there was no reply, I turned the handle and entered. All was dark. Striking a match I looked round. In a white bed at the farther end lay the child. I went up and bent softly over him. He was lying with one hand beneath his cheek. He looked worn and tired, and now and then moaned as if in trouble. When I touched him lightly on the shoulder he started up and opened his eyes. A dazed

expression of surprise swept over his face; then with an eager cry he stretched out both his hands and clasped one of mine.

“I am so glad to see you,” he said. “Dr. Fietta told me you were angry Ñ that I had offended you. I very nearly cried when I missed you that morning at Malta, and Dr. Fietta said I should never see you any more. I don’t like him Ñ I am afraid of him. Have you come to take me home?” As he spoke he glanced eagerly round in the direction of the door, clutching my hand still tighter as he did so.

“Yes, I shall take you home, Cecil. I have come for the purpose,” I answered; “but are you quite well?”

“That’s just it; I am not. I have awful dreams at night. Oh, I am so glad you have come back and you are not angry. Did you say you were really going to take me home?”

“To-morrow, if you like.”

“Please do. I am Ñ stoop down, I want to whisper to you Ñ I am dreadfully afraid of Dr. Fietta.”

“What is your reason?” I asked.

“There is no reason,” answered the child, “but somehow I dread him. I have done so ever since you left us at Malta. Once I woke in the middle of the night and he was bending over me Ñ he had such a queer look on his face, and he used that syringe again. He was putting something into my arm Ñ he told me it was morphia. I did not want him to do it, for I thought you would rather he didn’t. I wish mother had sent me away with you. I am afraid of him; yes, I am afraid of him.”

“Now that I have come, everything will be right,” I said.

“And you will take me home to-morrow?”

“Certainly.”

“But I should like to see Vesuvius first. Now that we are here it seems a pity that I should not see it. Can you take me to Vesuvius to-morrow morning, and home

in the evening, and will you explain to Dr. Fietta?”

“I will explain everything. Now go to sleep. I am in the house, and you have nothing whatever to fear.”

“I am very glad you have come,” he said wearily. He flung himself back on his pillow; the exhausted look was very manifest on his small, childish face. I left the room, shutting the door softly.

To say that my blood boiled can express but little the emotions which ran through my frame Ñ the child was in the hands of a monster. He was in the very clutch of the Brotherhood, whose intention was to destroy his life. I thought for a moment. There was nothing now for it but to see Fietta, tell him that I had discovered his machinations, claim the boy, and take him away by force. I knew that I was treading on dangerous ground. At any moment my own life might be the forfeit for my supposed treachery to the cause whose vows I had so madly taken. Still, if I saved the boy nothing else really mattered.

I went downstairs into the great central hall, interviewed the concierge, who told me that Fietta had returned, asked for the number of his private sitting-room, and, going there, opened the door without knocking. At a writing-table at the farther end sat the doctor. He turned as I entered, and, recognising me, started up with a sudden exclamation. I noticed that his face changed colour, and that his beady eyes flashed all ugly fire. Then, recovering himself, he advanced quietly towards me.

“This is another of your unexpected surprises, Mr. Head,” he said with politeness. “You have not, then, gone on to Cairo? You change your plans rapidly.”

“Not more so than you do, Dr. Fietta,” I replied, watching him as I spoke.

“I was obliged to change my mind,” he answered. “I heard in Malta that cholera had broken out in Cairo. I could not therefore take my patient there. May I inquire why I have the honour of this visit? You will excuse my saying so, but this action of yours forces me to suspect that you are following me. Have you a reason?”

He stood with his hands behind him, and a look of furtive vigilance crept into his small eyes.

“This is my reason,” I replied. I boldly drew the hypodermic syringe from my pocket as I spoke.

With an inconceivably rapid movement he hurried past me, locked the door, and placed the key in his pocket. As he turned towards me again I saw the glint of a long, bright stiletto which he had drawn and was holding in his right hand, which he kept behind him.

“I see you are armed,” I said quietly, “but do not be too hasty. I have a few words to say to you.” As I spoke I looked him full in the face, then I dropped my voice.

“I am one of the Brotherhood of the Seven King’s!”

When I uttered these magical words he started back and looked at me with dilated eyes.

“Your proofs instantly, or you are a dead man,” he cried hoarsely. Beads of sweat gleamed upon his forehead.

“Put that weapon on the table, give me your right hand, and you shall have the proofs you need,” I answered.

He hesitated, then changed the stiletto to his left hand, and gave me his right. I grasped it in the peculiar manner which I had never forgotten, and bent my head close to his. The next moment I had uttered the password of the Brotherhood.

“La Regina,” I whispered.

“E la regina,” he replied, flinging the stiletto on the carpet.

“Ah!” he continued, with an expression of the strongest relief, while he wiped the moisture from his forehead. “This is too wonderful. And now tell me, my friend, what your mission is? I knew you had stolen my syringe, but why did you do it? Why did you not reveal yourself to me before? You are, of course, under the Queen’s orders?”

“I am,” answered, “and her orders to me now are to take Lord Kairn home to England overland to-morrow morning.”

“Very well. Everything is finished Ñ he will die in one month.”

“From Mediterranean fever? But it is not necessarily fatal,” I continued.

“That is true. It is not always fatal acquired in the ordinary way, but by our methods it is so.”

“Then you have administered more of the micro-organisms since Malta?”

“Yes; I had another syringe in my case, and now nothing can save him. The fever will commence in six days from now.”

He paused for a moment or two.

“It is very odd,” he went on, “that I should have had no communication. I cannot understand it.” A sudden flash of suspicion shot across his dark face. My heart sank as I saw it. It passed, however, the next instant; the man’s words were courteous and quiet.

“I of course accede to your proposition,” he said: “everything is quite safe. This that I have done can never by any possibility be discovered. Madame is invincible. Have you yet seen Lord Kairn?”

“Yes, and I have told him to be prepared to accompany me home to-morrow.”

“Very well.”

Dr. Fietta walked across the room, unlocked the door and threw it open.

“Your plans will suit me admirably,” he continued. “I shall stay on here for a few days more, as I have some private business to transact. To-night I shall sleep in peace. Your shadow has been haunting me for the last three days.

I went from Fietta’s room to the boy’s. He was wide awake and started up when he saw me.

“I have arranged everything, Cecil,” I said, “and you are my charge now. I mean to take you to my room to sleep.”

“Oh,” he answered, “I am glad. Perhaps I shall sleep better in your room. I am not afraid of you Ñ I love you.” His eyes, bright with affection, looked into mine. I lifted him into my arms, wrapped his dressing-gown over his shoulders,

and conveyed him through the folding-doors, down the corridor, into the room I had secured for myself. There were two beds in the room, and I placed him in one.

“I am so happy,” he said, “I love you so much. Will you take me to Vesuvius in the morning, and then home in the evening?”

“I will see about that. Now go to sleep,” I answered.

He closed his eyes with a sigh of pleasure. In ten minutes he was sound asleep. I was standing by him when there came a knock at the door. I went to open it. A waiter stood without. He held a salver in his hand. It contained a letter, also a sheet of paper and an envelope stamped with the name of the hotel.

“From the doctor, to be delivered to the signor immediately,” was the laconic remark.

Still standing in the doorway, I took the letter from the tray, opened it, and read the following words:

“You have removed the boy and that action arouses my mistrust. I doubt your having received any Communication from Madame. If you wish me to believe that you are a bon-fide member of the Brotherhood, return the boy to his own sleeping-room, immediately.”

I took a pencil out of my pocket and hastily wrote a few words on the sheet of paper, which had been sent for this purpose.

“I retain the boy. You are welcome to draw your own conclusions.”

Folding up the paper I slipped it into the envelope, and wetting the gum with my tongue, fastened it together, and handed it to the waiter who withdrew. I re-entered my room and locked the door. To keep the boy was imperative, but there was little doubt that Fietta would now telegraph to *Mme. Koluchy* (the telegraphic office being open day and night) and find out the trick I was playing upon him. I considered whether I might not remove the boy there and then to another hotel, but decided that such a step would be useless. Once the emissaries of the Brotherhood were put upon my track the case for the child and myself would be all but hopeless.

There was likely to be little sleep for me that night. I paced up and down my lofty room. My thoughts were keen and busy. After a time, however, a strange confusion seized me. One moment I thought of the child, the next of *Mme. Koluchy*, and then again I found myself pondering some abstruse and comparatively unimportant point in science, which I was perfecting at home. I shook myself free of these thoughts, to walk about again, to pause by the bedside of the child, to listen to his quiet breathing.

Perfect peace reigned over his little face. He had resigned himself to me, his terrors were things of the past, and he was absolutely happy. Then once again that queer confusion of brain returned. I wondered what I was doing, and why I was anxious about the boy. Finally I sank upon the bed at the farther end of the room, for my limbs were tired and weighted with a heavy oppression. I would rest for a moment, but nothing would induce me to close my eyes. So I thought, and flung myself back on my pillow. But the next instant all present things were forgotten in dreamless and heavy slumber.

I awoke long hours afterwards, to find the sunshine flooding the room, the window which led on to the balcony wide open, and Cecil's bed empty. I sprang up with a cry; memory returned with a flash. What had happened? Had Fietta managed to get in by means of the window? I had noticed the balcony outside the window on the previous night. The balcony of the next room was but a few feet distant from mine. It would be easy for any one to enter there, spring from one balcony to the other, and so obtain access to my room. Doubtless this had been done. Why had I slept? I had firmly resolved to stay awake all night. In an instant I had found the solution. Fietta's letter had been a trap. The envelope which he sent me contained poison on the gum. I had licked it, and so received the fatal soporific. My heart beat wildly. I knew I had not an instant to lose. With hasty strides I went into Fietta's sitting-room: there was no one there; into his bedroom, the door of which was open: it was also empty. I rushed into the hall.

"The gentleman and the little boy went out about half an hour ago," said the concierge, in answer to my inquiries. "They have gone to Vesuvius Ñ a fine day for the trip." The man smiled as he spoke.

My heart almost stopped.

"How did they go?" I asked.

“A carriage, two horses Ñ best way to go.”

In a second I was out in the Piazza del Municipio. Hastily selecting a pair-horse carriage out of the group of importunate drivers, I jumped in.

“Vesuvius,” I shouted, “as hard as you can go.”

The man began to bargain. I thrust a roll of paper-money into his hand. On receiving it he waited no longer, and we were soon dashing at a furious speed along the crowded, ill-paved streets, scattering the pedestrians as we went. Down the Via Roma, and out on to the Santa Lucia Quay, away and away through endless labyrinths of noisome, narrow streets, till at length we got out into the more open country at the base of the burning mountain. Should I be in time to prevent the catastrophe which I dreaded? For I had been up that mountain before, and knew well the horrible danger at the crater’s mouth Ñ a slip, a push, and one would never be seen again.

The ascent began, and the exhausted horses were beginning to fail. I leapt out, and giving the driver a sum which I did not wait to count, ran up the winding road of cinders and pumice that curves round beneath the observatory. My breath had failed me, and my heart was beating so hard that I could scarcely speak when I reached the station where one takes ponies to go over the new, rough lava. In answer to my inquiries, Cook’s agent told me that Fietta and Cecil had gone on not a quarter of an hour ago.

I shouted my orders, and flinging money right and left, I soon obtained a fleet pony, and was galloping recklessly over the broken lava. Throwing the reins over the pony’s head I presently jumped off, and ran up the little, narrow path to the funicular wire-laid railway that takes passengers up the steep cone to the crater.

“Just gone on, sir,” said a Cook’s official, in answer to my question.

“But I must follow at once,” I said excitedly, hurrying towards the little shed.

The man stopped me.

“We don’t take single passengers,” he answered.

“I will, and must, go alone,” I said. “I’ll buy the car, and the railway, and you,

and the mountain, if necessary, but go I will. How much do you want to take me alone?"

"One hundred francs," he answered impertinently, little thinking that I would agree to the bargain.

"Done!" I replied.

In astonishment he counted out the notes which I handed to him, and hurried at once into the shed. Here he rang an electric bell to have the car at the top started back, and getting into the empty car, I began to ascend Ñ up, and up, and up. Soon I passed the empty car returning. How slowly we moved! My mouth was parched and dry, and I was in a fever of excitement. The smoke from the crater was close above me in great wreaths. At last we reached the top. I leapt out, and without waiting for a guide, made my way past, and rushed up the active cone, slipping in the shifting, loose, gritty soil. When I reached the top a gale was blowing, and the scenery below, with the Bay and Naples and Sorrento, lay before me, the most magnificent panorama in the world. I had no time to glance at it, but hurried forward past crags of hot rock, from which steam and sulphur were escaping. The wind was taking the huge volumes of smoke over to the farther side of the crater, and I could just catch sight of two figures as the smoke cleared for a moment. The figures were those of Fietta and the boy. They were evidently making a dtour of the crater, and had just entered the smoke. I heard a guide behind shout something to me in Italian, but I took no notice, and plunged at once into the blinding, suffocating smoke that came belching forth from the crater.

I was now close behind Fietta and the boy. They held their handkerchiefs up to their faces to keep off the choking sulphurous fumes, and had evidently not seen me. Their guide was ahead of them. Fietta was walking slowly; he was farthest away from the crater's mouth. The boy's hand was within his; the boy was nearest to the yawning gulf. A hot and choking blast of smoke blinded me for a moment, and hid the pair from view; the next instant it passed. I saw Fietta suddenly turn, seize the boy, and push him towards the edge. Through the rumbling thunder that came from below I heard a sharp cry of terror, and bounding forward I just caught the lad as he reeled, and hurled him away into safety.

With a yell of baffled rage Fietta dashed through the smoke and flung himself

upon me. I moved nimbly aside, and the doctor, carried on by the impetus of his rush, missed his footing in the crumbling ashes and fell headlong down through the reeking smoke and steam into the fathomless, seething caldron below.

“The Doctor ... missed his footing.”

What followed may be told in a few words. That evening I sailed for Malta with the boy. Dr. Benson administered the antitoxin in time, and the child's life was saved. Within a fortnight I brought him back to his mother.

It was reported that Dr. Fietta had gone mad at the edge of the crater, and in an excess of maniacal fury had first tried to destroy the boy and then flung himself in. I kept my secret.

II.

THE WINGED ASSASSIN.

MY scientific pursuits no longer interested me. I returned to my house in Regent's Park, but only to ponder recent events. With the sanction of conscience I fully intended to be a traitor to the infamous Brotherhood which, in a moment of mad folly, I had joined. From henceforth my object would be to expose *Mme. Koluchy*. By so doing, my own life would be in danger; nevertheless, my firm determination was not to leave a stone unturned to place this woman and her confederates in the felon's dock of an English criminal court. To effect this end one thing was obvious: single-handed I could not work. I knew little of the law, and to expose a secret society like *Mme. Koluchy's*, I must invoke the aid of the keenest and most able legal advisers.

Colin Dufrayer, the man I had just met before my hurried visit to Naples, was assuredly the person of all others for my purpose. He was one of the smartest lawyers in London. I went therefore one day to his office. I was fortunate in finding him in, and he listened to the story, which I told him in confidence, with the keenest attention.

“If this is true, Head,” he said, you yourself are in considerable danger.”

“Yes,” I answered; “nevertheless, my mind is made up. I will enter the lists against *Mme. Koluchy*.”

His face grew grave, furrows lined his high and bald forehead, and knitted themselves together over his watchful, grey eyes.

“If any one but yourself had brought me such an incredible story, Head, I should have thought him mad,” he said, at last. “Of course, one knows that from time to time a great master in crime arises and sets justice at defiance; but that this woman should be the leader of a deliberately organized crusade against the laws of England is almost past my belief. Granted it is so, however, what do you wish me to do?”

“Give me your help,” I answered; “use your ingenuity, employ your keenest agents, the most trusted and experienced officers of the law, to watch this woman day and night, and bring her and her accomplices to justice. I am a rich man, and I am prepared to devote both my life and my money to this great cause. When we have obtained sufficient evidence,” I continued, “let us lay our information before the authorities.”

He looked at me thoughtfully; after a moment he spoke.

“What occurred in Naples has doubtless given the Brotherhood a considerable shock,” he said, “and if *Mme. Koluchy* is as clever as you suppose her to be, she will remain quiet for the present. Your best plan, therefore, is to do nothing, and allow me to watch. She suspects you, she does not suspect me.”

“That is certainly the case,” I answered.

“Take a sea voyage, or do something to restore your equilibrium, Head; you look overexcited.”

“So would you be if you knew the woman, and if you had just gone through my terrible experiences.”

“Granted, but do not let this get on your nerves. Rest assured that I won’t leave a stone unturned to convict the woman, and that when the right moment comes I will apply to you.”

I had to be satisfied with this reply, and soon afterwards I left Dufrayer. I spent a winter of anxiety, during which time I heard nothing of *Mme. Koluchy*. Once again my suspicions were slumbering, and my attention was turned to that science which was at once the delight and solace of my life, when, in the May of

the following year, I received a note from Dufrayer. It ran as follows: Ñ

“MY DEAR HEAD, Ñ I have received an invitation both for you and myself to dine and sleep next Friday at Sir John Winton’s place at Epsom. You are, of course, aware that his horse, Ajax, is the favourite for the Derby. Don’t on any account refuse this invitation Ñ throw over all other engagements for the sake of it. There is more in this than meets the eye.

“Yours sincerely,

“COLIN DUFRAYER.”

I wired back to Dufrayer to accept the invitation, and on the following Friday went down to Epsom in time for dinner. Dufrayer had arrived earlier in the day, and I had not yet had an opportunity of seeing him alone. When I entered the drawing-room before dinner I found myself one of a large party. My host came forward to receive me. I happened to have met Sir John several times at his club in town, and he now signified his pleasure at seeing me in his house. A moment afterwards he introduced me to a bright-eyed girl of about nineteen years of age. Her name was Alison Carr. She had very dark eyes and hair, a transparent complexion and a manner full of vivacity and intelligence. I noticed, however, an anxious expression about her lips, and also that now and then, when engaged in the most animated conversation, she lost herself in a reverie of a somewhat painful nature. She would wake from these fits of inattention with an obvious start and a heightened colour. I found she was to be my companion at dinner, and soon discovered that hers was an interesting, indeed, delightful, personality. She knew the world and could talk well. Our conversation presently drifted to the great subject of the hour, Sir John Winton’s colt, Ajax.

“He is a beauty,” cried the girl. “I love him for himself, as who would not who had ever seen him? Ñ but if he wins the Derby, why, then, my gratitude ÑÑ” She paused and clasped her hands, then drew herself up, colouring.

“Are you very much interested in the result of the race?” I could not help asking.

“All my future turns on it,” she said, dropping her voice to a low whisper. “I think,” she continued, “Mr. Dufrayer intends to confide in you. I know something about you, Mr. Head, for Mr. Dufrayer has told me. I am so glad to meet you. I cannot say any more now, but my position is one of great anxiety.”

Her words somewhat surprised me, but I could not question her further at that moment. Later on, however, when we returned to the drawing-room, I approached her side. She looked up eagerly when she saw me.

“I have been all over Europe this summer,” she said gaily; “don’t you want to see some of my photographs?”

She motioned me to a seat near her side, and taking up a book opened it. We bent over the photographs; she turned the pages, talking eagerly. Suddenly, she put her hand to her brow, and her face turned deadly pale.

“What is the matter?” I asked.

She did not speak for a moment, but I noticed that the moisture stood on her forehead. Presently she gave a sigh of relief.

“It has passed,” she said. “Yes, I suffer in my head an indescribable agony, but it does not last now more than a moment or two. At one time the pain used to stay for nearly an hour, and I was almost crazy at the end. I have had these sharp sort of neuralgic pains from a child, but since I have consulted *Mme. Koluchy*”

I started. She looked up at me and nodded.

“Of course you have heard of her,” she said; “who has not? She is quite the most wonderful, delightful woman in existence. She, indeed, is a doctor to have confidence in. I understand that the men of the profession are mad with jealousy, and small wonder, her cures are so marvellous. Yes, Mr. Head, I went to quite half a dozen of our greatest doctors, and they could do nothing for me; but since I have been to *Mme. Koluchy* the pain comes but seldom, and when it does arise from any cause it quickly subsides. I have much to thank her for. Have you ever seen her?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“And don’t you like her?” continued the girl eagerly. “Is she not beautiful, the most beautiful woman in the world? Perhaps you have consulted her for your health; she has a great many men patients.”

I made no reply; Miss Carr continued to speak with great animation.

“It is not only her beauty which impresses one,” she said, “it is also her power Ñ she draws you out of yourself completely. When I am away from her I must confess I am restless Ñ it is as though she hypnotized me, and yet she has never done so. I long to go back to her even when ÑÑ” She hesitated and trembled. Some one came up, and commonplace subjects of conversation resumed their sway.

That evening late I joined Dufrayer in the smoking-room. We found ourselves alone, and I began to speak at once.

“You asked me to come here for a purpose,” I said. “Miss Carr, the girl whom I took in to dinner, further told me that you had something to communicate. What is the matter?”

“Sit down, Head; I have much to tell you.”

“By the way,” I continued, as I sank into the nearest chair, “do you know that Miss Carr is under the influence of *Mme. Koluchy*?”

“I know it, and before I go any further, tell me what you think of her.”

“She is a handsome girl,” I replied, “and I should say a good one, but she seems to have trouble. She hinted at such, and in any case I observed it in her face and manner.”

“You are right, she is suffering from a very considerable anxiety. I will explain all that to you presently. Now, please, give your best attention to the following details. It is about a month ago that I first received a visit from Frank Calthorpe, Sir John Winton’s nephew, and the junior partner of Bruce, Nicholson, & Calthorpe, the great stockjobbers in Garrick Gardens. I did some legal business for his firm some years ago, but the matter on which Calthorpe came to see me was not one connected with his business, but of a purely private character.”

“Am I to hear what it is?”

“You are, and the first piece of information I mean to impart to you is the following. Frank Calthorpe is engaged to Miss Carr.”

“Indeed!”

“The engagement is of three months’ date.”

“When are they to be married?”

“That altogether depends on whether Sir John Winton’s favourite, Ajax, wins the Derby or not.”

“What do you mean?”

“To explain, I must tell you something of Miss Carr’s early history.” I sat back in my chair and prepared to listen. Dufrayer spoke slowly.

“About a year ago,” he began, “Alison Carr lost her father, She was then eighteen years of age, and still at school. Her mother died when she was five years old. The father was a West Indian merchant, and had made his money slowly and with care. When he died he left a hundred thousand pounds behind him and an extraordinary will. The girl whom you met to-night was his only child. Henry Carr, Alison’s father, had a brother, Felix Carr, a clergyman. In his will Henry made his brother Alison’s sole guardian, and also his own residuary legatee. The interest of the hundred thousand pounds was to be devoted altogether to the girl’s benefit, but the capital was only to come into her possession on certain conditions. She was to live with her uncle, and receive the interest of the money as long as she remained single. After the death of the uncle she was still, provided she was unmarried, to receive the interest during her lifetime. At her death the property was to go to Felix Carr’s eldest son, or, in case he was dead, to his children. Provided, however, Alison married according to the conditions of the will, the whole of the hundred thousand pounds was to be settled on her and her children. The conditions were as follows:

“The man who married Alison was to settle a similar sum of one hundred thousand upon her and her children, and he was also to add the name of Carr to his own. Failing the fulfilment of these two conditions, Alison, if she married, was to lose the interest and capital of her father’s fortune, the whole going to Felix Carr for his life, and after him to his eldest son. On this point the girl’s father seems to have had a crank Ñ he was often heard to say that he did not intend to amass gold in order to provide luxuries for a stranger.

“‘Let the man who marries Alison put pound to pound,’ he would cry; ‘that’s fair enough, otherwise the money goes to my brother.’

“Since her father’s death, Alison has had one or two proposals from elderly men of great wealth, but she naturally would not consider them. When she became engaged, however, to Calthorpe, he had every hope that he would be able to fulfil the strange conditions of the will and meet her fortune with an equal sum on his own account. The engagement is now of three months’ date, and here comes the extraordinary part of the story. Calthorpe, like most of his kind, is a speculator, and has large dealings both in stocks and shares and on the turf. He is a keen sportsman.

“Now, pray, listen. Hitherto he has always been remarkable for his luck, which has been, of course, as much due to his own common sense as anything else; but since his engagement to Miss Carr his financial ventures have been so persistently disastrous, and his losses so heavy, that he is practically now on the verge of ruin. Several most remarkable and unaccountable things have happened recently, and it is now almost certain that some one with great resources has been using his influence against him. You will naturally say that the person whose object it would be to do so is Alison’s uncle, but beyond the vaguest suspicion, there is not the slightest evidence against him. He has been interested in the engagement from the first, and preparations have even been made for the wedding. It is true that Alison does not like him, and resents very much the clause in the will which compels her to live with him; but as far as we can tell, he has always been systematically kind to her, and takes the deepest interest in Calthorpe’s affairs. Day by day, however, these affairs grow worse and worse.

“About a fortnight ago, Calthorpe actually discovered that shares were being held against him on which he was paying enormous differences, and had finally to buy them back at tremendous loss. The business was done through a broker, but the identity of his client is a mystery. We now come to his present position, which is a most crucial one. Next Wednesday is the Derby Day, and Calthorpe hopes to retrieve his losses by a big coup, as he has backed Ajax at an average price of five to two in order to win one hundred thousand on the horse alone. He has been quietly getting his money on during the last two months through a lot of different commission agents. If he secures this big haul he will be in a position to marry Alison, and his difficulties will be at an end. If, on the other hand, the horse is beaten, Calthorpe is ruined.”

“What are the chances for the horse?” I asked.

“As far as I can tell, they are splendid. He is a magnificent creature, a bay colt

with black points, and comes of a splendid stock. His grandsire was Colonel Gillingham's Trumpeter, who was the champion of his year, winning the Derby, the Two Thousand Guineas, and St. Leger. There is not a three-year-old with such a fashionable ancestry as Ajax, and Sir John Winton is confident that he will follow their glorious record."

"Have you any reason to suspect *Mme. Koluchy* in this matter?" I asked.

"None. Without doubt Calthorpe possesses an enemy, but who that enemy is remains to be discovered. His natural enemy would be Felix Carr, but to all appearance the man has not moved a finger against him. Felix is well off, too, on his own account, and it is scarcely fair to suspect him of the wish to deliberately ruin his niece's prospects and her happiness. On the other hand, such a series of disasters would not happen to Calthorpe without a cause, and we have got to face that fact. *Mme. Koluchy* would, of course, be capable of doing the business, but we cannot find that Felix Carr even knows her."

"His niece does," I cried. "She consults her Ñ she is under her care."

"I know that, and have followed up the clue very carefully," said Dufrayer. "Of course, the fact that Alison visits her two or three times a week, and in all probability confides in her fully, makes it all-important to watch her carefully. That fact, with the history which you have unfolded of *Mme. Koluchy*, makes it essential that we should take her into our calculations, but up to the present there is not a breath of suspicion against her. All turns on the Derby. If Ajax wins, whoever the person is who is Calthorpe's secret enemy, will have his foul purpose defeated."

Early the following morning, Sir John Winton took Dufrayer and myself to the training stables. Miss Carr accompanied us. The colt was brought out for inspection, and I had seldom seen a more magnificent animal. He was, as Dufrayer had described him, a bright bay, with black points. His broad forehead, brilliant eyes, black muzzle, and expanded nostrils proclaimed the Arab in his blood, while the long, light body, with the elongated limbs, were essentially adapted for the maximum development of speed. As the spirited creature curveted and pranced before us, our admiration could scarcely be kept in bounds. Miss Carr in particular was almost feverishly excited. She went up to the horse and patted him on his forehead. I heard her murmur something low into his ear. The creature turned his large and beautiful eye upon her as if he understood; he

further responded to the girl's caress by pushing his nose forward for her to stroke.

"I have no doubt whatever of the result," said Sir John Winton, as he walked round and round the animal, examining his points and emphasizing his perfections. "If Ajax does not win the Derby, I shall never believe in a horse again." He then spoke in a low tone to the trainer, who nodded; the horse was led back to his stables, and we returned to the house.

As we crossed the Downs I found myself by Miss Carr's side.

"Yes," she exclaimed, looking up at me, her eyes sparkling, "Ajax is safe to win. Has Mr. Dufrayer confided in you, Mr. Head?"

"He has," I answered.

"Do you understand my great anxiety?"

"I do, but I think you may rest assured. If I am any judge of a horse, the favourite is sure to win the race."

"I wish Frank could hear you," she cried; "he is terribly nervous. He has had such a queer succession of misfortunes. Of course, I would marry him gladly, and will, without any fortune, if the worst comes to the worst; but there will be no worst," she continued brightly, "for Ajax will save us both." Here she paused, and pulled out her watch.

"I did not know it was so late," she exclaimed. "I have an appointment with *Mme. Koluchy* this morning. I must ask Sir John to send me to the station at once."

She hurried forward to speak to the old gentleman, and Dufrayer and I fell behind.

Soon afterwards we all returned to London, and on the following Monday I received a telegram from Dufrayer.

"Come to dinner Ñ seven o'clock, important," was his brief message.

I responded in the affirmative, and at the right hour drove off to Dufrayer's flat

in Shaftesbury Avenue, arriving punctual to the moment.

“I have asked Calthorpe to meet you,” exclaimed Dufrayer, coming forward when I appeared; “his ill-luck dogs him closely. If the horse loses he is absolutely ruined. His concealed enemy becomes more active as the crucial hour approaches. Ah, here he comes to speak for himself.”

The door was thrown open, and Calthorpe was announced. Dufrayer introduced him to me, and the next moment we went into the dining-room. I watched him with interest. He was a fair man, somewhat slight in build, with a long, thin face and a heavy moustache. He wore a worried and anxious look painful to witness; his age must have been about twenty-eight years. During dinner he looked across at me several times with an expression of the most intense curiosity, and as soon as the meal had come to an end, turned the conversation to the topic that was uppermost in all our minds.

“Dufrayer has told me all about you, Mr. Head; you are in his confidence, and therefore in mine.”

“Be assured of my keen interest,” I answered. “I know how much you have staked on the favourite. I saw the colt on Saturday. He is a magnificent creature, and I should say is safe to win, that is ÑÑ” I paused, and looked full into the young man’s face. “Would it not be possible for you to hedge on the most advantageous terms?” I suggested. “I see the price to-night is five to four.”

“Yes, and I could win thirty thousand either way if I could negotiate the transaction, but that would not effect my purpose. You have heard, I know, from Dufrayer, all about my engagement and the strange conditions of old Carr’s will. There is no doubt that I possess a concealed enemy, whose object is to ruin me; but if Ajax wins I could obtain sufficient credit to right myself, and also to fulfil the conditions of Carr’s will. Yes, I will stand to it now, every penny. The horse can win, and by God he shall!”

As he spoke Calthorpe brought down his fist with a blow on the table that set the glasses dancing. A glance was sufficient to show that his nerves were strung up to the highest pitch, and that a little more excitement would make him scarcely answerable for his actions.

“I have already given you my advice on this matter,” said Dufrayer, in a grave tone. He turned and faced the young man as he spoke. “I would say

emphatically, choose the thirty thousand now, and get out of it. You have plunged far too heavily in this matter. As to your present run of ill-luck, it will turn, depend upon it, and is only a question of time. If you hedge now you will have to put off your marriage, that is all. In the long run you will be able to fulfil the strange conditions which Carr has enjoined on his daughter's future husband, and if I know Alison aright, she will be willing to wait for you. If, on the other hand, you lose, all is lost. It is the ancient adage, 'A bird in the hand.Õ"

"It would be a dead crow," he interrupted excitedly, "and I want a golden eagle." Two hectic spots burned his pale cheeks, and the glitter in his eye showed how keen was the excitement which consumed him.

"I saw my uncle this morning," he went on. "Of course, Sir John knows my position well, and there is no expense spared to guard and watch the horse. He is never left day or night by old and trusted grooms in the training stables. Whoever my enemy may be, I defy him to tamper with the horse. By the way, you must come down to see the race, Dufrayer; I insist upon it, and you too, Mr. Head. Yes, I should like you both to be there in the hour of my great success. I saw Rushton, the trainer, to-day, and he says the race is all over, bar shouting."

This was Monday night, and the following Wednesday was Derby Day. On the next evening, impelled by an uncontrollable desire to see Calthorpe, I called a hansom and gave the driver the name of his club. I felt certain that I should find him there. When I arrived the porter told me that he was in the house, and sending up my card, I went across to the tape machine, which was ticking away under its glass case in the hall. Two or three men were standing beside it, chatting. The Derby prices had just come through, and a page-boy was tearing the tape into lengths and pinning them on a green baize board in the hall. I glanced hurriedly through them. Evens Ajax, four to one Bright Star, eleven to two Midge, eight to one Day Dawn. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and Calthorpe stood beside me. I was startled at his appearance. There was a haggard, wild look in his eyes.

"It seems to be all right," I said cheerfully. "I see Ajax has gone off a point since this morning, but I suppose that means nothing?"

"Oh, nothing," he replied; "there has been a pot of money going on Bright Star all day, but the favourite can hold the field from start to finish. I saw him this morning, and he is as fit as possible. Rushton, the trainer, says he absolutely

can't lose."

A small, dark, man in evening dress approached us and overheard Calthorpe's last remark.

"I'll have a level monkey about that, if you like, Mr. Calthorpe," he said, in a low, nasal voice.

"It's a wager," retorted Calthorpe, drawing out his pocket-book with silver-bound edges, and entering the bet. "I'll make it a thousand, if you like?" he added, looking up.

"With pleasure," cried the little man. "Does your friend fancy anything?"

"No, thank you," I replied.

The man turned away, and went back to his companions.

"Who is that fellow?" I asked of Calthorpe.

"Oh, a very decent little chap. He's on the Stock Exchange, and makes a pretty big book on his own account."

"So I should think," I replied. "Why do you suppose he wants to lay against Ajax?"

"Hedging, I should imagine," answered Calthorpe carelessly. "One thousand one way or the other cannot make any difference now."

He had scarcely said the words before Dufrayer entered the hall.

"I have been looking for you, Head," he said, just nodding to Calthorpe as he spoke, and coming up to my side. "I went to your house and heard you were here, and hoped I should run you to earth. I want to speak to you. Can you come with me?"

"Anything wrong?" asked Calthorpe uneasily.

"I hope not," replied Dufrayer, "but I want to have a word with Head. I will see you presently, Calthorpe."

He linked his hand through my arm, and we left the club.

“What is it?” I asked, the moment we got into the street.

“I want you to come to my flat. Miss Carr is there, and she wishes to see you.”

“Miss Carr at your flat, and she wishes to see me?”

“She does. You will soon know all about it, Head. Here, let us get into this hansom.”

He hailed one which was passing; we got into it and drove quickly to Shaftesbury Avenue. Dufrayer let himself in to his rooms with a latchkey, and the next moment I found myself in Alison’s presence. She started up when she saw the lawyer and myself.

“Now, Miss Carr,” said Dufrayer, shutting the door hastily, “we have not a moment to lose, Will you kindly repeat the story to Head which you have just told me?”

“But is there anything to be really frightened about?” she asked.

“I do not know of any one who can judge of that better than Mr. Head. Tell him everything, please, and at once.”

Thus adjured, the girl began to speak.

“I went as usual to *Mme. Koluchy* this afternoon,” she began; “her treatment does me a great deal of good. She was even kinder than usual. I believe her to be possessed of a sort of second sight. When she assured me that Ajax would win the Derby, I felt so happy that I laughed in my glee. She knows, no one better, how much this means to me. I was just about to leave her when the door of the consulting-room was opened, and who should appear standing on the threshold but my uncle, the Rev. Felix Carr! There is no love lost between my uncle and myself, and I could not help uttering a cry, half of fear and half of astonishment. I could see that he was equally startled at seeing me.

“ŒWhat in the name of fortune has brought you to *Mme. Koluchy*?’ he cried.

“Madame rose in her usual stately way and went forward to meet him.

““Your niece, Alison, is quite an old patient of mine,’ she said; ‘but did you not receive my telegram?’

““No; I left home before it arrived,’ he answered. ‘The pains grew worse, and I felt I must see you. I have taken a horrible cold on the journey.’ As he spoke he took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and sneezed several times. He continued to stand on the threshold of the room.

““Well, good-bye, Alison, keep up your courage,’ cried *Mme. Koluchy*. She kissed me on my forehead and I left. Uncle Felix did not take any further notice of me. The moment I went out the door of the consulting-room was closed, and the first thing I saw in the corridor was a torn piece of letter. It lay on the floor, and must have dropped out of Uncle Felix’s pocket. I recognized the handwriting to be that of *Mme. Koluchy*, I picked it up, and these words met my eyes: ‘Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse.’ I could not read any further, as the letter was torn across and the other half not in my possession, but the words frightened me, although I did not understand them. I became possessed with a dreadful sense of depression. I hurried out of the house. I was so much at home with *Mme. Koluchy* now that I could go in and out as much as I pleased. I drove straight to see you, Mr. Dufrayer. I hoped you would set my terrors at rest, for surely Ajax cannot be the horse alluded to. The words haunt me, but there is nothing in them, is there? Please tell me so, Mr. Head Ñ please allay my fears.”

“May I see the torn piece of paper?” I asked gravely.

The girl took it out of her pocket and handed it to me.

“You don’t mind if I keep this?” I said.

“No, certainly; but is there any cause for alarm?”

“I hope none, but you did well to consult Dufrayer. Now, I have something to ask you.”

“What is that?”

“Do not repeat what you were good enough to tell Dufrayer and me to Calthorpe.”

“Why so?”

“Because it would give him needless anxiety. I am going to take the matter up, and I trust all will be well. Keep your own counsel; do not tell what you have just told us to another living soul; and now I must ask you to leave us.”

Her face grew whiter than ever; her anxious eyes travelled from my face to Dufrayer’s.

“I will see you to a hansom,” I said. I took her downstairs, put her into one, and returned to the lawyer’s presence.

“I am glad you sent for me, Dufrayer,” I answered. “Don’t you see how grave all this is? If Ajax wins the Derby, the Rev. Felix Carr Ñ I know nothing about his character, remember Ñ will lose the interest on one hundred thousand pounds and the further chance of the capital being secured to his son. You see that it would be very much to the interest of the Rev. Felix if Ajax loses the Derby. Then why does he consult *Mme. Koluchy*? The question of health is surely a mere blind. I confess I do not like the aspect of affairs at all. That woman has science at her fingers’ ends. I shall go down immediately to Epsom and insist on Sir John Winton allowing me to spend the night in the training stables.”

“I believe you are doing the right thing,” answered Dufrayer. “You, who know *Mme. Koluchy* well, are armed at a thousand points.”

“I shall start at once,” I said.

I bade Dufrayer good-bye, hailed a hansom, desired the man to drive me to Victoria Station, and took the next train to Epsom.

I arrived at Sir John Winton’s house about ten o’clock. He was astonished to see me, and when I begged his permission to share the company of the groom in the training stables that night, he seemed inclined to resent my intrusion. I did not wish to betray Alison, but I repeated my request with great firmness.

“I have a grave reason for making it,” I said, “but one which at the present moment it is best for me not to disclose. Much depends on this race. From the events which have recently transpired, there is little doubt that Calthorpe has a secret enemy. Forewarned is forearmed. Will you share my watch to-night in the training stables, Sir John?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “I do not see that you have any cause for alarm, but

under the circumstances, and in the face of the mad way that nephew of mine has plunged, I cannot but accede to your request. We will go together.”

We started to walk across the Downs. As we did so, Sir John became somewhat garrulous.

“I thought Alison would have come by your train,” he said, “but have just had a telegram asking me not to expect her. She is probably spending to-night with *Mme. Koluchy*. By the way, Head, what a charming woman that is.”

“Do you know her?” I asked.

“She was down here on Sunday. Alison begged me to invite her. We all enjoyed her company immensely. She has a wonderful knowledge of horses; in fact, she seems to know all about everything.”

“Has she seen Ajax?” I asked. My heart sank, I could not tell why.

“Yes, I took her to the stables. She was interested in all the horses, and above all in Ajax. She is certain he will win the Derby.”

I said nothing further. We arrived at the stables. Sir John and I spent a wakeful night. Early in the morning I asked to be allowed to examine the colt. He appeared in excellent condition, and the groom stood by him, admiring him, praising his points, and speaking about the certain result of the day’s race.

“Here’s the Derby winner,” he said, clapping Ajax on his glossy side. “He’ll win the race by a good three lengths. By the way, I hope he won’t be off his feed this morning.”

“Off his feed exclaimed Sir John. What do you mean?”

“What I say, sir. We couldn’t get the colt to touch his food last night, although we tempted him with all kinds of things. There ain’t nothing in it, I know, and he seems all right now, don’t he?”

“Try him with a carrot,” said Sir John.

The man brought a carrot and offered it to the creature. He turned away from it, and fixed his large, bright eyes on Sir John’s face. I fancied there was suffering

in them. Sir John seemed to share my fears. He went up to the horse and examined it critically, feeling its nose and ears.

“Tell Saunders to step across,” he said, turning to the groom. He mentioned a veterinary surgeon who lived close by. “And look you here, Dan, keep your own counsel. If so much as a word of this gets out, you may do untold mischief.”

“No fear of me, sir,” said the man. He rushed off to fetch Saunders, who soon appeared.

The veterinary surgeon was a thickly built man, with an intelligent face. He examined the horse carefully, taking his temperature, feeling him all over, and finally stepping back with a satisfied smile.

“There’s nothing to be alarmed about, Sir John,” he said. “The colt is in perfect health. Let him have a mash presently with some crushed corn in it. I’ll look in in a couple of hours, but there’s nothing wrong. He is as fit as possible.”

As the man left the stables, Sir John uttered a profound yawn.

“I confess I had a moment’s fright,” he said; “but I believe it was more from your manner than anything else, Mr. Head. Well, I am sleepy. Won’t you come back to the house and let me offer you a shake-down?”

“No,” I replied, “I want to return to town. I can catch an early train if I start at once.”

He shook hands with me, and I went to the railway station. The oppression and apprehension at my heart got worse moment by moment. For what object had *Mme. Koluchy* visited the stables? What was the meaning of that mysterious writing which I had in my pocket Ñ “Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse”? What did the woman, with her devilish ingenuity, mean to do? Something bad, I had not the slightest doubt.

I called at Dufrayer’s flat and gave him an account of the night’s proceedings.

“I don’t like the aspect of affairs, but God grant my fears are groundless,” I cried. “The horse is off his feed, but Sir John and the vet. are both assured there is nothing whatever the matter with him. *Mme. Koluchy* was in the stables on Sunday; but, after all, what could she do? We must keep the thing dark from

Calthorpe and trust for the best.”

At a quarter to twelve that day I found myself at Victoria. When I arrived on the platform I saw Calthorpe and Miss Carr coming to meet me. Dufrayer also a moment afterwards made his appearance. Miss Carr’s eyes were full of question, and I avoided her as much as possible. Calthorpe, on the contrary, seemed to have recovered a good bit of nerve, and to be in a sanguine mood. We took our seats, and the train started for Epsom. As we alighted at the Downs station, a man in livery hurried up to Calthorpe.

“Sir John Winton is in the paddock, sir, he said, touching his hat. “He sent me to you, and says he wishes to see you at once, sir, and also Mr. Head.”

The man spoke breathlessly, and seemed very much excited.

“Very well; tell him we’ll both come,” replied Calthorpe. He turned to Dufrayer. “Will you take charge of Alison?” he said.

Calthorpe and I moved off at once.

“What can be the matter?” cried the young man. “Nothing wrong, I hope. What is that?” he cried the next instant.

The enormous crowd was increasing moment by moment, and the din that rose from Tattersall’s ring seemed to me unusually loud so early in the day’s proceedings. As Calthorpe uttered the last words he started and his face turned white.

“Good God! Did you hear that?” he cried, dashing forward. I followed him quickly; the ring was buzzing like an infuriated beehive, and the men in it were hurrying to and fro as if possessed by the very madness of excitement. It was an absolute pandemonium. The stentorian tones of a brass-voiced bookmaker close beside us fell on my ears:

“Here, I’ll bet five to one Ajax Ñ five to one Ajax!”

The voice was suddenly drowned in the deafening clamour of the crowd, the air seemed to swell with the uproar. Were my worst fears confirmed? I felt stunned and sick. I turned round; Calthorpe had vanished.

Several smart drags were drawn up beside the railings. I glanced up at the occupants of the one beside me. From the box-seat looking down at me with the amused smile of a spectator sat *Mme. Koluchy*. As I caught her eyes I thought I detected a flash of triumph, but the next moment she smiled and bowed gracefully.

“You are a true Englishman, Mr. Head,” she said. “Even your infatuated devotion to your scientific pursuits cannot restrain you from attending your characteristic national fte. Can you tell me what has happened? Those men seem to have suddenly gone mad Ñ is that a part of the programme?”

“Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse,” was my strange reply. I looked her full in the face. The long lashes covered her brilliant eyes for one flashing moment, then she smiled at me more serenely than ever.

“I will guess your enigma when the Derby is won,” she said.

I raised my hat and hurried away. I had seen enough: suspicion was changed into certainty. The next moment I reached the paddock. I saw Calthorpe engaged in earnest conversation with his uncle.

“It’s all up, Head,” he said, when he saw me.

“Don’t be an idiot, Frank,” cried Sir John Winton angrily. “I tell you the thing is impossible. I don’t believe there is anything the matter with the horse. Let the ring play their own game, it is nothing to us. Damn the market! I tell you what it is, Frank. When you plunged as you did, you would deserve it if the horse fell dead on the course; but he won’t Ñ he’ll win by three lengths. There’s not another horse in the race.”

Calthorpe muttered some inaudible reply and turned away. I accompanied him.

“What is the matter?” I asked, as we left the paddock.

“Saunders is not satisfied with the state of the horse. His temperature has gone up; but, there! my uncle will see nothing wrong. Well, it will be all over soon. For God’s sake, don’t let us say anything to Alison.”

“Not a word,” I replied.

We reached the grand stand. Alison's earnest and apprehensive eyes travelled from her lover's face to mine. Calthorpe went up to her and endeavoured to speak cheerfully.

"I believe it's all right," he said. "Sir John says so, and he ought to know. It will be all decided one way or another soon. Look, the first race is starting."

We watched it, and the one that followed, hardly caring to know the name of the winner. The Derby was timed for three o'clock Ñ it only wanted three minutes to the hour. The ring below was seething with excitement, Calthorpe was silent, now gazing over the course with the vacant expression of a man in a day-dream.

Bright Star was a hot favourite at even money.

"Against Ajax, five to one," rang out with a monotonous insistence.

There was a sudden lull, the flag had fallen. The moments that followed seemed like years of pain Ñ there was much senseless cheering and shouting, a flash of bright colours, and the race was over. Bright Star had won. Ajax had been pulled up at Tattenham Corner, and was being led by his jockey.

Twenty minutes later Dufrayer and I were in the horse's stable.

"Will you allow me to examine the horse for a moment?" I said to the veterinary surgeon.

"It will want some experience to make out what is the matter," replied Saunders; "it's beyond me."

I entered the box and examined the colt carefully. As I did so the meaning of *Mme. Koluchy's* words became plain. Too late now to do anything Ñ the race was lost and the horse was doomed. I looked around me.

"Has any one been bitten in this stable?" I asked.

"Bitten!" cried one of the grooms. "Why, I said to Sam last night" Ñ he apostrophized the stable-boy Ñ "that there must be gnats about. See my arm, it's all inflamed."

"Hold!" I cried, "what is that on your sleeve?"

“A house-fly, I suppose, sir,” he answered.

“Stand still,” I cried. I put out my hand and captured the fly. “Give me a glass,” I said. “I must examine this.”

One was brought and the fly put under it. I looked at it carefully. It resembled the ordinary house-fly, except that the wings were longer. Its colour was like an ordinary humming-bee.

“I killed a fly like that this morning,” said Sam, the stable-boy, pushing his head forward.

“When did you say you were first bitten?” I asked, turning to the groom.

“A day or two ago,” he replied. “I was bitten by a gnat, I don’t rightly know the time. Sam, you was bitten too. We couldn’t catch it, and we wondered that gnats should be about so early in the year. It has nothing to do with the horse, has it, sir?”

I motioned to the veterinary surgeon to come forward, and once more we examined Ajax. He now showed serious and unmistakable signs of malaise.

“Can you make anything out?” asked Saunders.

“With this fly before me, there is little doubt,” I replied; “the horse will be dead in ten days Ñ nothing can save him. He has been bitten by the tse-tse fly of South Africa Ñ I know it only too well.”

My news fell on the bystanders like a thunderbolt.

“Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse,” I found myself repeating. The knowledge of this fact had been taken advantage of Ñ the devilish ingenuity of the plot was revealed. In all probability *Mme.* Koluchy had herself let the winged assassin loose when she had entered the stables on Sunday. The plot was worthy of her brain, and hers alone.

“You had better look after the other horses,” I said, turning to the grooms. “If they have not been bitten already they had better be removed from the stables immediately. As for Ajax, he is doomed.”

Late that evening Dufrayer dined with me alone. Pity for Calthorpe was only exceeded by our indignation and almost fear of *Mme. Koluchy*.

“What is to happen?” asked Dufrayer.

“Calthorpe is a brave man and will recover,” I said. “He will win Miss Carr yet. I am rich, and I mean to help him, if for no other reason than in order to defeat that woman.”

“By the way,” said Dufrayer, “that scrap of paper which you hold in your possession, coupled with the fact that Mr. Carr called upon *Mme. Koluchy*, might induce a magistrate to commit them both for conspiracy.”

“I doubt it,” I replied; “the risk is not worth running. If we failed, the woman would leave the country, to return again in more dangerous guise. No, Dufrayer, we must bide our time until we get such a case against her as will secure conviction without the least doubt.”

“At least,” cried Dufrayer, “what happened to-day has shown me the truth of your words Ñ it has also brought me to a decision. For the future I shall work with you, not as your employed legal adviser, but hand in hand against the horrible power and machinations of that woman. We will meet wit with wit, until we bring her to the justice she deserves.”

III.

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM.

THERE was now little doubt that *Mme. Koluchy* knew herself to be in personal danger. On the Derby Day I had thrown down the gauntlet with a vengeance Ñ her object henceforth would be to put me out of the way. I lived in an atmosphere of intangible mystery, which was all the darker and more horrible because it was felt, not seen.

By Dufrayer’s advice, I left the bringing of this dangerous woman to justice in his hands. He employed the cleverest and most up-to-date detectives to have her secretly watched, and from time to time they brought us their reports. Clue after clue arose: each clue was carefully followed, but it invariably led to disappointing results. Madame eluded every effort to bring a definite charge against her. The money we were spending, however, was not entirely in vain. We

learned that her influence and the wide range of her acquaintances were far beyond what we had originally surmised. Her fame as a healer, her marvellous and occult cures, the reputation of her great wealth and dazzling beauty, increased daily, and I was certain that before long I should meet her in the lists. The encounter was destined to come sooner even than I had anticipated, and in a manner most unexpected.

It was the beginning of the following November that I received an invitation to dine with an old friend, Harry de Brett. He was several years my senior, and had recently succeeded to his father's business in the City – an old-established firm of bankers, whose house was in St. Mark's Court, Gracechurch Street. Only a few days previously I had seen it announced in the society papers that a marriage had been arranged between De Brett's only daughter, Geraldine, and the Duke of Friedeck, a foreign nobleman, whose name I had seen figuring prominently at many a function the previous season. I had known Geraldine since she was a child, and was glad to have an opportunity of offering my congratulations.

At the appointed hour, I found myself at De Brett's beautiful house in Bayswater, and Geraldine, who was standing near her father, came eagerly forward to welcome me. She was a pretty and very young girl, with a clear, olive complexion and soft, dark eyes. She had the innocent and naive manner of a schoolgirl. She was delighted to see me, and began to talk eagerly.

"Come and stand by this window, Mr. Head. I am so glad you were able to come – I want to introduce you to Karl – the Duke of Friedeck, I mean; he will be here in a minute or two." As she spoke she dropped her voice to a semi-whisper.

"You know, of course, that we are to be married soon?" she continued.

"I have heard of the engagement," I answered, "and I congratulate you heartily. I should like much to meet the Duke. His name is, of course, familiar to any one who reads the society papers."

"He is anxious to make your acquaintance also," she replied. "I told him you were coming, and he said –" She paused.

"But surely the Duke of Friedeck has never heard of me before?" I answered, in some surprise.

"I think he has," she answered. "He was quite excited when I spoke of you. I

asked him if he had met you; he said 'No,' but that you were very well known in scientific circles as a clever man. The Duke is a great scientist himself, Mr. Head, and I know he would like to have a chat with you. I am certain you will be friends."

Just at that moment the Duke was announced. He was a tall and handsome man of about five and thirty, with the somewhat florid complexion, blue eyes, and fair, curling hair of the Teuton. He was well dressed, and had the indescribable air of good breeding which proclaims the gentleman. I looked at him with much curiosity, being puzzled by an intangible memory of having seen his face before Ñ where and how I could not tell.

Geraldine tripped up to him and brought him to my side.

"Karl," she cried, "this is my friend Mr Head. Don't you remember we talked about him this morning?"

Friedeck bowed.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," he said to me. "Yours is a name of distinction in the world of science."

"That can scarcely be the case," I answered. "It is true I am fond of original research, but up to the present I have worked for my own pleasure alone."

"Nevertheless, the world has whispered of you," he replied. "I, too, am fond of science, and have lost myself more than once in its tortuous mazes. I have lately started a laboratory of my own, but just now other matters ÑÑ" He broke off abruptly, and glanced at Geraldine, who smiled and blushed.

Dinner was announced. I happened to sit not far from the guest of the evening, and noticed that he was a good conversationalist. There was scarcely a subject mentioned on which he had not something to say; and on more than one occasion his repartee was brilliant, and his remarks, touched with humour. Geraldine, in her white dress, with her soft, rather sad, eyes, her manner at once bright, sweet, and timid, made a contrast to this astute-looking man of the world.

I glanced from one to the other, and an uneasiness which I could scarcely account for sprang up within me. Notwithstanding his handsome appearance and his easy and courteous manner, I wondered if this man, nearly double her age,

was likely to make the pretty English girl happy.

As dinner progressed I observed that the Duke often took the trouble to look at me. I also noticed that whenever our eyes met he turned away. How was it possible for him to have heard of me before? Although I was a scientist, my researches were unknown to the world. I determined to take the first opportunity of solving this mystery.

Soon after eleven o'clock the guests took their leave, and I was just about to follow their example when De Brett asked me to have a pipe with him in his smoking-room. As we seated ourselves by the fire, he began to talk at once of his future son-in-law.

"He is a capital fellow, is he not, Head?" exclaimed my host. "I hope you have formed a favourable opinion of him?"

"I never form an opinion quickly," I answered, with caution. "The Duke of Friedeck is certainly distinguished in appearance, and ÑÑ"

"Oh, you are too cautious," cried De Brett, in some irritation; "you may take my word for it that he is all right. This is a great catch for my little girl. Of course, she will have plenty of money on her own account; but the Duke is not only of high family, he is also rich. He comes from Bavaria, and his title is absolutely genuine. Soon after the great Duke of Marlborough's wars, and almost immediately after the Battle of Blenheim, the Austrian Government took possession of the Dukedom of Friedeck, and until lately the family have remained in exile. It was only a year ago that the present Duke regained his rights and all the great estates. He was introduced to us by no less a person than Madame Koluchy. Ah! I see you start. You have heard of her, of course?"

"Who has not?" I replied.

"Do you know her?"

"I have met her," I said. It was only with an effort I could control the ungovernable excitement which seized me at the mere mention of this woman's name.

"She dines with us next week," continued De Brett; "a wonderful woman, wonderful! Her cures are marvellous; but that is after all the least part of her

interesting personality. She is so fascinating, so wise and good-natured, that men and women alike fall at her feet. As to Geraldine, she has taken an immense fancy to her.”

“Where did you first meet her?” I asked.

“In Scotland last summer. She was staying with my old friends, the Campbells, for a couple of nights, and Friedeck was also one of the guests. If she is a friend of yours, Head Ñ and I rather expect so from your manner Ñ will you dine with us again next Thursday in order to meet her? We are going down to my place, Forest Manor, in Essex, and Madame is to stay with us for a couple of nights. We expect quite a large party, and can give you a bed Ñ will you come?”

“I wish I could, but I fear it will be impossible,” I replied. “It is true that I know Madame Koluchy, but ÑÑ” I broke off. “Don’t ask me any more at the moment, De Brett. The fact is, your news has excited me, you will say unreasonably.”

De Brett gazed at me with earnestness.

“You have fallen under the spell of the most beautiful woman in London,” he said, after a pause; “is that so, Head?”

“You may put it that way if you like,” I said, “but I cannot explain myself to-night. Be assured, however, of my deep interest in this matter. Pray tell me anything more you may happen to know with regard to the Duke of Friedeck.”

“You certainly are a strange fellow,” said my host. “You are wearing at the present moment an air of quite painful mystery. However, here goes. You wish to hear about the Duke Ñ I have nothing but good to tell of him. He is a rich man, and dabbles now and then on the Stock Exchange, but not to any serious extent. A week ago he arranged for a loan from my bank, depositing as security some of the most splendid diamonds I have ever seen. They are worth a king’s ransom and each stone is historical. He brought the diamonds away from the estates in Bavaria, and they are to be reset and presented to Geraldine just before the wedding.”

“How large was the amount of the loan?” I asked.

De Brett raised his eyebrows. He evidently thought that I was infringing on the privileges even of an old friend.

“Compared with the security, the loan was a trifling one,” he said, after a pause; “not more than £10,000. Friedeck will pay me back next week, as he wishes to release the diamonds in order to have them ready to give to Geraldine on her wedding-day.”

“And when do you propose that the wedding shall take place?” I continued.

“Ah, you have me there, Head; that is the painful part. You know what my motherless girl is to me Ñ well, the Duke insists upon taking her away between now and Christmas. They are to spend Christmas in the old feudal style in the old castle in Bavaria. It is a great wrench parting from the little one, but she will be happy. I never met a man I took more warmly to than Karl Duke of Friedeck. You can see for yourself that the child is devoted to him.”

“I can,” I said. “I will wish you good-night now, De Brett. Be assured once again of my warm interest in all that concerns you and Geraldine.”

I shook hands with my host, and a moment later found myself in the street. I called a hansom, and desired the man to drive straight to Dufrayer’s flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. He had just come in, and welcomed me eagerly.

“By all that’s fortunate, Head!” he exclaimed. “I was just on my way to see you.”

“Then we have well met,” I answered.

“Dufrayer, I have come here on a most important matter. But first of all tell me, have you ever heard of the Duke of Friedeck?”

“The Duke of Friedeck!” cried Dufrayer. “Why, it was on that very subject I wished to see you. You have, of course, observed the announcement of his approaching marriage in the society papers?”

“I have,” I replied. “He is engaged to Geraldine de Brett. I have been dining at De Brett’s house to-night, and met the Duke at dinner. De Brett has been telling me all about him. Dufrayer, I have learned to my consternation that the man was introduced to the De Bretts by *Mme.* Koluchy. That fact is quite enough to rouse my suspicions, but I see you have something to communicate on your own account. What is it?”

“Sit down, Head. You know, of course, that I am having Madame watched. The Duke of Friedeck is beyond doubt one of her satellites, and I am strongly inclined to think that this is a new plot brewing.”

“Just my own opinion,” I replied; “but tell me what you know.”

“I was coming to see you, for I hoped that you might remember the Duke’s name from your old association with the Brotherhood.”

“I do not recall it, but names mean nothing. The man is handsome, and has the manners of a gentleman. When he entered De Brett’s drawing-room I thought for a moment that I must have met him before, but that idea quickly vanished. Nevertheless, he contrived to arouse my suspicions by more than one stealthy glance which he favoured me with, even before his connection with *Mme. Koluchy* was mentioned. I regard him now as a highly suspicious individual, and I fully believe he is playing some game a little deeper than appears.”

“Beyond doubt, the man has plenty of money, and moves in good circles,” said Dufrayer. “He is known, however, to live a pretty fast life. He shoots at Hurlingham, drives his own drag, rents a moor in Scotland, and has a suite at the Hotel Cecil; but nothing can be discovered against him except that he is constantly seen in Madame’s company.”

“And that is quite enough,” I replied. “Friedeck is one of Madame’s satellites. Without doubt, there is mischief ahead.”

“I agree with you,” said Dufrayer; “I think it more than possible that this plausible Duke is simply another serpent springing from the head of this modern Medusa. In that case, De Brett ought to be warned.”

I rose uneasily.

“I would have warned him to-night,” I answered, “but I want more evidence. How are we to get it?”

“Tyler’s agents are doing their best, and Madame is closely watched.”

“Yes, but that woman could deceive the devil himself,” I said bitterly.

“That is true,” answered Dufrayer, “and to show our hand too soon might be

fatal. We cannot move in this matter until we have got more circumstantial evidence. How we are to set to work is the puzzle!”

“Well,” I said, “I shall move Heaven and earth in this matter. I have known Geraldine since she was a child. She is a sweet, innocent, motherless girl. The great risk to her happiness that may now be impending is too serious to contemplate quietly. If I had time I should go to Bavaria in order to find out if the Duke’s story is true; but in any case, it might be well to send one of Tyler’s agents to look up the supposed estates.”

“I will do so,” said Dufrayer.

“And in the meantime I shall watch,” I said, “and if an opportunity occurs, believe me, De Brett shall have his warning.”

As I spoke I bade my friend good-night and returned to my own house.

The next few days were spent in anxious thought, but no immediate action seemed possible. Clue after clue still arose, but only to vanish into nothing. I seldom now went into society without hearing *Mme. Koluchy’s* name, and all the accounts of her were favourable. She was the sort of Woman to charm the eye and fire the imagination. Her personal attractions were some of her strongest potentialities.

On the following Tuesday, as I was walking down Oxford Street, a brougham drew up suddenly at the pavement, the window was lowered, and a girlish face looked eagerly out.

“Mr. Head,” cried Geraldine de Brett eagerly, “you are the very man I want. Come here, I have something to say.” I approached her at once. “We are dreadfully disappointed at your refusing to come to us on Thursday,” she continued. “We are making up a delightful party. My father and I are going down to Forest Manor for a fortnight, in order to have plenty of room to entertain our friends. This is a personal matter with me. I ask you to come to us as a personal favour. Will you refuse?”

I looked full into the sparkling and lovely eyes of the young girl. The colour came and went in her cheeks; she laid one of her small hands for a moment on mine.

“I must tell you everything,” she continued eagerly. “Of course I want you, but I am not the only one. *Mme. Koluchy* Ñ ah, you have heard of her?”

“Who has not?” was my cautious reply.

“Yes, but, Mr. Head, you are concealing something. Madame is one of your very greatest friends: she has told me so. It is only an hour since I left her. She is most anxious to meet you on Thursday at our house. I promised you should be there Ñ wasn’t it rash of me? But I made up my mind that I would insist on your coming. Now, you won’t allow me to break my word, will you?”

“Did *Mme. Koluchy* really say that she wished to see me?” I asked. As I put the question I felt my face turning pale. I looked again full at Miss de Brett. It was evident that she misinterpreted my emotion. Well, that mattered nothing. I quickly made up my mind.

“I had an engagement for Thursday,” I said, “but your word is law Ñ I cannot refuse you.”

Geraldine laughed.

“Madame doubted my power to bring you, but I knew you would come, if I could really see you.”

“Suppose we had not met in this chance sort of way?”

“I was going to your house. I had no intention of leaving a stone unturned. Without you my party will not be complete. Yes, you will come, and it is all right. You will hear from father to-morrow. He very often drives out to Forest Manor from the bank, and perhaps you can arrange to come with him, but you will get all particulars straight from him. Thank you a thousand times Ñ you have made me a happy girl.”

She waved her hand to me in farewell, and the brougham rolled out of sight.

My blood was coursing quickly through my veins and my mind was made up. Madame would not wish me to meet her at De Brett’s house without a strong reason. With her usual astuteness she was using Geraldine de Brett as her tool in more senses than one. I must not delay another moment in warning the banker.

Calling a hansom, I desired the man to drive me straight to De Brett's bank in the City, and soon after twelve o'clock I found myself in Gracechurch Street. In a few moments the hansom turned down a narrow lane leading into St. Mark's Court. Here I paid my driver, and a moment later found myself in the open space in front of the bank. This was a cul-de-sac, but there was another lane leading into it also from Gracechurch Street running parallel to the one I had come down, and separated from it by a narrow row of buildings, which came to an abrupt termination about fifty feet from the houses forming the farther side of the court.

Well as I knew De Brett, I had not been at the old bank for some years, and looked around me now eagerly, until my eye fell upon the large brass plate bearing the well-known name. I entered the office, and going up to the counter asked if Mr. De Brett were in. The clerk replied in the affirmative, and giving him my card he passed through a door into an inner room. The next moment he reappeared and requested me to step inside: I found De Brett seated at a writing-table, upon which a circle of light fell from a shaded incandescent.

"Welcome, Head," he exclaimed, rising and coming forward with his usual heartiness of manner. "To what am I indebted for this visit? Sit down. I am delighted to see you. By the way, Geraldine tells me ÑÑ"

"I have just met your daughter," I interrupted, "and it is principally on account of that meeting that I have come here to trouble you during business hours."

"Oh, I can spare you ten minutes," he answered, looking around him as he spoke. "The fact is this, Head, Geraldine is anxious that you should join our party at Forest Manor, and I wish you would reconsider your determination. The Duke has taken a fancy to you, and as you happen to know *Mme. Koluchy*, it would be a pleasure to us all if you would give us the benefit of your society for a night or two."

"I have promised Geraldine to come," I answered gravely: "but, De Brett, you must pardon me. I have intruded on you in your business hours to speak on a most delicate private matter. However you may receive what I have to say, I must ask you to hear it in confidence, and with that good feeling that has prompted me to come to you."

"My dear Head, what do you mean? Pray explain yourself."

“I am uneasy,” I continued, “very uneasy. I am also in a peculiar position, and cannot disclose the reason of my fears. You are pleased with the match which Geraldine is about to make. Now, I have reasons for doubting the Duke of Friedeck, reasons which I cannot at the present moment disclose, but I am bound Ñ yes, bound, De Brett, in your girl’s interests Ñ to warn you as to your dealings with him.”

De Brett looked at me through his gold-rimmed spectacles with a blank expression of amazement.

“If it were any other man who spoke to me in this strain,” he said at last, “I believe I should show him the door. Are you aware, Head, that this is a most serious allegation? You are bound in all honour to explain yourself.”

“I cannot do so at the present moment. I can only repeat that my fears are grave. All I ask of you is to use double caution, to find out all you can about the man’s antecedents ÑÑ”

De Brett interrupted me, rising hastily from his seat.

“In our dealings one with the other,” he said, “this is the first time in which you have shown bad taste. I shall see the Duke this afternoon, and shall be bound to acquaint him, in his and my own interests, with your communication.”

“I hope you won’t do so. Remember, my warning is given in confidence.”

“It is not fair to give a man such a warning, and then to give him no reason for it,” retorted the banker.

“I will give you my reasons.”

“When?”

“On Thursday night. Will you regard my confidence as sacred until then?”

“You have disturbed me considerably, but I will do so. I should be sorry to alarm Geraldine unnecessarily. I am quite certain you are mistaken. You never saw the Duke until you met him at my house?”

“That I believe to be true, but I cannot say anything further now. I will explain

my reasons fully on Thursday night.”

De Brett rose from his seat. He bade me good-bye, but not with his customary friendliness. I went away, to pass the time until Thursday in much anxiety.

After grave thought I resolved, if I discovered nothing fresh with regard to Friedeck, to acquaint De Brett with what I knew of *Mme.* Koluchy. If Geraldine married the Duke, she should at least do so with her father’s eyes opened. I little guessed, however, when I made these plans, what circumstances were about to bring forth.

On the following Thursday morning I awoke from a disturbed sleep to find London enveloped in one of the thickest fogs that had been known for some years. The limit of my vision scarcely extended beyond the area railings round which the soot-laden mist clung in a breathless calm.

In the course of the morning I received a telegram from De Brett.

“Meet me at the bank not later than a quarter-past four,” were the few words which it contained.

Soon after three o’clock I started for my destination, avoiding omnibuses and preferring to walk the greater part of the way. I arrived at St. Mark’s Court at the time named, and was just approaching the bank when two men knocked violently against me in the thick fog. One of them apologized, but before I could make any reply vanished into the surrounding gloom. I had caught a glimpse of his features, however. He was the Duke of Friedeck. Across the narrow court, at the opposite side from the bank, I saw a stream of light from an open door making a blurred gleam in the surrounding darkness. I crossed the court to see what this indicated. I then discovered that the light came from an old-fashioned eating-house, something in the style of the celebrated “Cock” in Fleet Street. As I stood in the shadow, the two men who had knocked against me entered the eating-house.

I returned now to the bank. As soon as I arrived the manager came up to me.

“Mr. De Brett was called out about half an hour ago,” he said, “but he has asked you to wait for him here, Mr. Head. He expects to be back not later than half-past four.”

I seated myself accordingly, a clerk brought me the Times and I drew up my chair in front of a bright fire. Now and then some one made a desultory remark about the fog, which was thickening in intensity each moment.

The time flew by: the bank had, of course, closed at four o'clock, but the clerks were busy finishing accounts and putting the place in order for the night. The different tills were emptied of their contents, and the money was taken down to the great vaults where the different safes were kept. The hands of the clock over the mantel-piece pointed to a quarter to five, when the sound of wheels was heard distinctly outside, and the next moment I saw a splendidly equipped brougham and pair draw up outside the bank. A footman dismounted and handed the commissionaire a note. This was brought into the office. It was for me; a clerk gave it to me. I glanced at the writing, and saw that the letter was from De Brett. I tore open the envelope, and read as follows: Ñ

“DEAR HEAD, Ñ I have been unexpectedly detained at Lynn’s bank, in Broad Street, so have sent the brougham for you. Will you come on at once and pick me up at Lynn’s? Please ask Derbyshire, the manager, for the keys of the small safe. He will give them to you after he has locked up the strong-room.

“Yours,

“HARRY DE BRETT.”

I turned to the manager. He was an elderly man, with grizzled hair and an anxious expression of face.

“Mr. de Brett wants me to bring him the keys of the small safe,” I said. I saw the man raise his brows in surprise.

“That is an unusual request,” he answered “but, of course, it must be as Mr. de Brett wishes. As a rule, either Mr. Frome or I keep the keys, as Mr. de Brett never cares to be troubled with them.”

“Here is his letter,” I replied, handing it to the manager. He read it, retaining it in his hand.

“Do you object to my keeping this, Mr. Head? The request is so unusual, that I should like to have this note as my authority.”

“You can certainly keep the note,” I said.

“Very well, sir: I shall have to detain you for a few moments, as we have not quite cleared the tills. The keys of all the other safes are kept in the small one. I will bring you the keys of the small safe in a moment or two.”

The clerks bustled about, the work of the night was quickly accomplished, and shortly after five o’clock I was seated in De Brett’s luxurious brougham, with the keys of the small safe in my pocket.

We went along very slowly, as the fog seemed to grow thicker each moment. Suddenly as the coachman piloted his way in the direction of Broad Street I began to feel a peculiar sensation. My head was giddy, an unusual weakness trembled through my nerves, and for the first time I noticed that the brougham was full of a faint, sweet odour. Doubtless the smell of the fog had prevented my observing this at first. The sensation of faintness grew worse, and I now made an effort to attract the coachman’s attention. This I altogether failed to do, and becoming seriously alarmed I tried to open the door; but it resisted all my efforts, as also did the windows, which were securely fixed. The horrible feeling that I was the victim of some dastardly plot came over me with force. I shouted and struggled to attract attention, and finally tried to break the windows. All in vain Ñ the sense of giddiness grew worse, everything seemed to whirl before my mental vision Ñ the bank, De Brett, the keys of the safe which I had in my pocket, the thought of Geraldine and her danger, were mixed up in a hideous phantasmagoria. The next moment I had lost consciousness.

When I came to myself I found that I was lying on a piece of waste ground which I afterwards found to be in the neighbourhood of Putney. For one or two moments I could not in the least recall what had happened. Then my memory came back with a quick flash.

“The Duke of Friedeck! The bank! Geraldine!” I said to myself. I sprang to my feet and began a hasty examination of my pockets. Yes, my worst conjectures were confirmed, for the keys of the small safe were gone!

My watch and money were intact; the keys alone were stolen. I stood still for a moment half-dazed from the anæsthetic fumes which by some means had been liberated in the brougham. Then the need of immediate action came over me, and I made my way at once to the nearest railway station. I found to my relief

that it was only a little past eleven o'clock. Beyond doubt, I had recovered consciousness much sooner than the villains who had planned this terrible plot intended.

I took the next train to town, and on my way up resolved on my line of action. To warn De Brett was impracticable, for the simple reason that he was out of town. To waste time visiting Dufrayer was also not to be thought of. Without the least doubt, the bank was in imminent danger, and I must not lose an unnecessary moment in getting to St. Mark's Court.

As I thought over matters I felt more and more certain that the eating-house facing the bank was a rendezvous for Madame's agents. I hastily resolved, therefore, to disguise myself and go there. Once I had belonged to the infamous Brotherhood. I knew their password. By this means, if my suspicions were true, I could doubtless gain admission. As for the rest, I must leave it to chance.

As soon as I reached town I drove off at once to a theatrical agent, whose acquaintance I had already made. He remembered me, and I explained enough of the situation to induce him to render me assistance. In a very short time I was metamorphosed. By a few judicious touches twenty years were added to my age, a wig of dark hair completely covered my own, my complexion was dyed to a dark olive, and in a thick travelling cloak, with a high fur collar, I scarcely knew myself. My final act was to slip a loaded revolver into my pocket, and then, feeling that I was prepared for the worst, I hurried forth.

It was now between twelve and one in the morning, and the fog was denser than ever. Few men know London better than I do, but once or twice in that perilous journey I lost my way. At last, however, I found myself in St. Mark's Court. I was now breathing with difficulty: the fog was piercing my lungs and hurting my throat, my eyes watered. When I got into the court I heard the steady tramp of the policeman whose duty it was to guard the place at night. Taking no notice of him, I went across the court in the direction of the eating-house. The light within still burned, but dimly. There was a blur visible, nothing more. This came through one of the windows, for the door was shut. I tapped at the door. A man came immediately and opened it. He asked me what my business was. I repeated the password of the society. A change came over his face. My conjectures were verified. I was instantly admitted.

"Are you expecting to see a friend here to-night?" said the man. "It is rather late,

and we are just closing.”

As he uttered the words, like a flash of lightning, an old memory returned to me. I have said that when I first saw the Duke at De Brett’s house I was puzzled by an intangible likeness. Now I knew who the man really was. In the old days in Naples, an English boy of the name of Drake was often seen in Madame’s salons. Drake and the Duke of Friedeck were one and the same.

“I have come here to see Mr. Drake,” I said stoutly.

The man nodded. My chance shot had found its billet.

“Mr. Drake is upstairs,” he said. “Will you find your own way up, or shall I announce you?”

“I will find my own way,” I said. “He is in the ÑÑ”

“Room to the front Ñ third floor,” answered the man.

He returned to the dining-saloon, and I heard the swing-door close behind him. Without a moment’s hesitation I ascended the stairs. The stairs and passage were in complete darkness. I went up, passed the first and second stories, and on to the third. As I approached the landing of the third story I saw an open door and a gleam of light in a small room which faced the court. The light was caused by a lamp which stood on a deal table, the wick of which was turned down very low. Except the lamp and table there was no other furniture in the room. I went in and looked around me. The Duke was not present. I was just considering what my next step should be, when I heard voices and several steps ascending the stairs. I saw an empty cupboard, the door of which stood ajar. I made for it, and closed the door softly behind me. As the men approached, I slipped the revolver from my pocket and held it in my hand. It was probable that Friedeck had been told of my arrival. If so, he would search for me, and in all probability look in the cupboard. Three or four men at least were coming up the stairs, and I knew that my life was scarcely worth a moment’s purchase. I had a wild feeling of regret that I had not summoned the policeman in the court to my aid, and then the men entered the room. When they did so, I breathed a sigh of relief. They talked to one another as if I did not exist. Evidently the waiter downstairs had thought that my knowledge of the password was all-sufficient, and had not troubled himself to mention my appearance on the scene.

One of the men went up to the lamp, turned it on to a full blaze, and then placed it in the window.

“This will be sufficient for our purpose,” he said, with a laugh: “otherwise, with the fog as thick as it is now, the bolt might miss its mark.”

“The thicker the fog the safer,” said another voice, which I recognized as that of the Duke. “I am quite ready, gentlemen, if you are.”

“All right,” said the man who had first spoken, “I will go across to Bell’s house and fix the rope from the bar outside the window. As the bob of the pendulum you will swing true, Drake, no fear of that. You will swing straight to the balcony, as sure as mathematics. Have you anything else to ask?”

“No,” answered Friedeck. “I am ready. Get your part of the work through as quickly as you can: you cannot fail to see this window with the bright light in it. I will have the lower sash open, and be ready to receive the bolt from the crossbow with the light string attached.”

“That will do the business,” answered his confederate; “when the bolt reaches you, pull in as hard as you can, for the rope will be attached to the light string. The crossbar is here. You have only to attach it to the rope and swing across. Well, all right, I’m off.”

The man whose mission it was to send the bolt into the open window now left the room, and I heard his footsteps going softly downstairs. I opened the cupboard door about half an inch, and was able to watch the proceedings of the other three men who remained on the scene. The window was softly opened. They spoke in whispers. I could judge by their attitudes that all three were in the highest state of nervous excitement.

Presently a low cry of satisfaction from Friedeck reached my ears; something shot into the room and struck against the opposite wall. The next moment the men were pulling in a silken string, to which a wire rope was attached. I then saw the Duke remove his coat. A wooden crossbar was securely fastened to the end of the stout rope, the rope was held outside the window by the two confederates, and the Duke got upon the window-sill, slipped his legs over the crossbar, and the next instant had disappeared into space.

Where he had gone, what he was doing, were mysteries yet to be solved. The

men remained for a moment longer beside the window, then they softly closed the sash, and putting out the lamp left the room. I heard their steps descending the stairs, the sounds died away into utter stillness. I listened intently, and then, softly leaving the cupboard, approached the window. In the intense darkness caused by the fog I could not see a yard in front of me. De Brett's bank was in danger – the Duke of Friedeck and his accomplices were burglars; but what the crossbow, the rope, the bolt, the crossbar of wood, and the sudden disappearance of the Duke himself through the open window portended I could not fathom. My duty, however, was clear. I must immediately give the alarm to the policeman in the court, whose tramp I even now heard coming up to me through the fog.

I waited for a few moments longer, and then determined to make my exit. I ran downstairs, treading as softly as I could. I had just reached the little hall and put my hand on the latch of the door, when I was accosted.

“Who is there?” said a voice.

I replied glibly, “I am going in search of Drake.”

“You cannot see him, he is engaged,” said the same voice, and now a man came forward. He held a dark lantern in his hand and suddenly threw its bull's-eye full on my face. Perhaps he saw through my disguise; anyhow, he must have observed that my face was unfamiliar to him. The expression on his own changed to one of alarm. He suddenly made a low and peculiar whistle, and two or three other men entered the hall. The first man said something, the words of which I could not catch, and all four made a rush for me. But the door was on the latch. I burst it open, and escaped into the court. The thick fog favoured me, and I hoped that I had escaped the gang, when a heavy blow on the back of my head rendered me, for the second time within that ominous twenty-four hours, unconscious.

When I awoke I found myself in the ward of a London hospital, and the kind face of a house surgeon was bending over me.

“Ah! you'll do,” I heard him say: “you are coming to nicely. You had a nasty blow on your head, though. Don't talk just at present; you'll be all right in a couple of hours.”

I lay still, feeling bewildered. Figures were moving about the room, and the daylight was streaming in at the windows. I saw a nurse come up and look at me.

She bent down.

“You feel better? You are not suffering?” she said.

“I am not,” I replied; “but how did I get here? What has happened?”

“A policeman heard you cry and picked you up unconscious in a place called St. Mark’s Court. Some one gave you a bad blow on your head Ñ it is a wonder your skull was not cracked, but you are better. Have you a message to give to any one?”

“I must get up immediately,” I said; “I have not a moment to lose. Something dreadful has happened, and I must see to it. I must leave the hospital at once.”

“Not without the surgeon’s permission,” said the nurse. “Have you any friend you would like to be sent to you?”

I mentioned Dufrayer’s name. The nurse said she would dispatch a messenger immediately to his house and ask him to come to me.

I waited with what patience I could. The severe blow had fortunately only stunned me. I was not seriously hurt, and all the events of the preceding night, previous to the blow, presented themselves clearly before my memory.

In a little over an hour Dufrayer arrived. His eyes were blazing with excitement. He came up to me full of consternation.

“What has happened, Head?” he asked.

“Oh! I am all right; don’t bother about me,” I said. “But listen, Dufrayer, I must go to St. Mark’s Court immediately Ñ there is mischief.”

“St. Mark’s Court Are you mad? Have you heard anything?”

“Heard what?” I asked.

“They have done it, that’s all,” cried Dufrayer.

“What?” I exclaimed.

“Well, there’s the very devil to pay in the City this morning. De Brett’s bank was

broken into last night, the night watchman seriously injured, and securities and cash to the tune of one hundred thousand pounds taken from the strong-room, and the man has got clean away. Your messenger from here followed me to the bank. Tyler is there and De Brett. The daring of the robbery is unparalleled.”

“I can throw light on this matter,” I said. “Get the surgeon to give me leave to go, Dufrayer. There is not a moment to lose if we are to catch the scoundrel. I must accompany you to the bank.”

“Well, you seem all right, old chap, and if you have anything to say ÑÑ”

“I have,” I cried impatiently. “See the surgeon. I must get off immediately.”

Dufrayer did as I requested him. The surgeon shook his head over what he called my imprudence, but said he could not detain me against my will. Dufrayer and I stepped into a hansom, and on my way to the bank I repeated my strange adventures of the previous night.

“Did ever any one hear of another man doing such a foolhardy thing?” cried Dufrayer. “What possessed you to enter that hell alone beats my comprehension.”

“Never mind that now,” I replied. “Remember, I knew the Brotherhood; my one chance consisted in going alone. Thank goodness the fog has risen.”

A light breeze was blowing over the city, and as we entered St. Mark’s Court a ray of sunshine cast a watery gleam over the old smoke-begrimed buildings. We entered the bank and found De Brett, his manager, two police inspectors, and Tyler’s agent awaiting us.

De Brett exclaimed, when he caught sight of me:

“Ah, Head, here’s a pretty business! I’m a ruined man. The bank cannot stand a blow of this kind.”

“Courage,” I replied; “we may be able to put things right yet. I have a story to tell. Mr. Derbyshire, you have doubtless kept the note which Mr. de Brett wrote to me last night?”

“The note I wrote to you!” cried De Brett. “What do you mean?”

“Will you produce the note?” I said to the manager.

The man brought it and put it into his chief’s hand. De Brett read it with increasing amazement.

“But I never put pen to paper on such a fool’s errand,” he cried. “Why, I never take the keys of the small safe. Derbyshire and Frome have charge of them. Head, this note is a forgery. What in the name of Heaven does it mean?”

“It meant for me a brougham which was a death-trap,” I replied: “and it also meant the most dastardly scheme to rob you, and perhaps murder me, which has ever been conceived. But listen, let me tell my story.”

I did so, amidst the breathless silence of the spectators.

“And now,” I continued, “the best thing we can do, gentlemen, is to go across to the house from which the bolt was shot. It is possible that we may see something in that upper room which will explain the manner in which the burglar entered the bank.”

“I am at your service, Mr. Head,” said Inspector Brown, in a cheerful tone; “a mystery of this sort is quite to my mind. All the same, sir,” he continued, as he and I took the lead of the little procession which crossed St. Mark’s Court, “I cannot imagine how any man got into that window of the bank on the second floor without wings. There is a constable on patrol in the court all night, so ladders are out of the question. The annihilation of gravity is a new departure in the burglar’s art.”

We had now reached the building which faced the court, and which was between the bank and eating-house. It was composed entirely of offices Ñ we went up at once to the top floor. The door of the room which faced the court was locked. The inspector took a step back, and, flinging his shoulders against it, it flew open. The room was bare and unoccupied, but, as we entered, Inspector Brown uttered a cry.

“Here is confirmation of your story, Mr. Head.” As he spoke he lifted up a coil of strong rope which lay in a corner of the room. Attached to it was a crossbar of wood. A strong iron bar with a hook at one end and a crossbow also lay in the neighbourhood of the rope.

“The thing is as clear as daylight,” I exclaimed. “I could not put two and two together last night, for the fog fairly bewildered me, but now I see the whole scheme. Let me explain. This rope was sent by means of the crossbow across to the window in the eating-house. To the bolt of the crossbow was attached a silken cord, to which again the rope was fastened. The man who swung himself out of the window by the rope last night acted as the bob of the pendulum, and so reached the window of the bank. Swinging through the eating-house window and rising to the balcony outside the bank window, he then doubtless seized the handle of the outside frame and, settling on the balcony, cut out the glass with a diamond.”

“We will go at once and see the room in the eating-house,” said the inspector.

We did so, and found to our amazement that the door of the eating-house was locked and the place empty. After some slight difficulty we got the door burst open and went upstairs. Here we found the final confirmation of my words – the silken string which had been attached to the rope and cut from it before the Duke made his aerial flight.

“But who did it?” cried De Brett. “We must secure the scoundrel without a moment’s delay, for amongst other things he has stolen the Duke of Friedeck’s priceless securities, the diamonds. By the way,” continued the banker, “where is the Duke? I sent him a telegram and expected him here before now.”

An ominous silence fell upon every one. De Brett’s face grew white; he looked at me.

“For God’s sake, speak,” he cried. “Have you anything else to confide?”

“You must be prepared for bad news, De Brett,” I said. I went up and laid my hand on my old friend’s shoulder. “Thank God, I was in time. Your little girl is saved from the most awful fate which could overtake any woman. The man who committed the burglary was known to you as the Duke of Friedeck.”

De Brett stepped back: his face changed from white to purple.

“Then that accounts for the telegrams,” he said. “I received two yesterday, one from you telling me to expect you by a late train at Forest Manor, the other from that scoundrel. In it he said that he was unexpectedly detained in town. Doubtless both telegrams were sent by the same man.”

“Without doubt,” I replied. “The whole thing was carefully planned, and not a stone left unturned to secure the success of this most dastardly scheme. But, De Brett, I have one thing more to say. There is no Duke of Friedeck: it was an assumed name. I am prepared to swear to the man’s real identity when the police have secured him.”

The remainder of this story can be told in a few words. The ruffian who had posed as the Duke of Friedeck was captured a few days later, but the greater part of the securities and money which he had stolen were never recovered. Doubtless *Mme. Koluchy* had them in her possession. The man passed through his trial and received his sentence, but that has nothing to do with the story.

By the energetic aid of his many friends De Brett escaped ruin, and his bank still exists and prospers. He is a sadder and a wiser man.

IV.

THE LUCK OF PITSEY HALL.

AS the days and weeks went on *Mme. Koluchy* became more than ever the talk of London. The medical world agitated itself about her to an extraordinary degree. It was useless to gainsay the fact that she performed marvellous cures. Under her influence and treatment weak people became strong again. Those who stood at the door of the Shadow of Death returned to their intercourse with the busy world. Beneath her spell pain vanished. What she did and how she did it remained more than ever a secret. She dispensed her own prescriptions, but although some of her medicines were analyzed by experts, nothing in the least extraordinary could be discovered in their composition. The cure did not therefore lie in drugs. In what did it consist? Doctors asked this question one of another, and could find no satisfactory answer. The rage to consult Madame became stronger and stronger. Her patients adored her. The magnetic influence which she exercised was felt by each person with whom she came in contact.

Meanwhile Dufrayer and I watched and waited. The detective officers in Scotland Yard knew of some of our views with regard to this woman. Led by Dufrayer they were ceaselessly on the alert; but, try as the most able of their staff did, they could learn nothing of *Mme. Koluchy* which was not to her credit. She was spoken of as a universal benefactress, taking, it is true, large fees from those who could afford to pay; but, on the other hand, giving her services freely to the

people to whom money was scarce. This woman could scarcely walk down the street without heads being turned to look after her, and this not only on account of her remarkable beauty, but still more because of her genius and her goodness. As she passed by, blessings were showered upon her, and if the person who called down these benedictions was rewarded by even one glance from those lovely and brilliant eyes, he counted himself happy.

About the middle of January the attention of London was diverted from *Mme. Koluchy* to a murder of a particularly mysterious character. A member of the Cabinet of the name of Delacour was found dead in St. James's Park. His body was discovered in the early morning, in the neighbourhood of Marlborough House, with a wound straight through the heart. Death must have been instantaneous. He was stabbed from behind, which showed the cowardly nature of the attack. I knew Delacour, and for many reasons was appalled when the tidings reached me. As far as any one could tell, he had no enemies. He was a man in the prime of life, of singular power of mind and strength of character, and the only possible motive for the murder seemed to be to wrest some important State secrets from his possession. He had been attending a Cabinet meeting in Downing Street, and was on his way home when the dastardly deed was committed. Certain memoranda respecting a loan to a foreign Government were abstracted from his person, but his watch, a valuable ring, and some money were left intact. The police immediately put measures in active train to secure the murderer, but no clue could be obtained. Delacour's wife and only daughter were broken-hearted. His position as a Cabinet Minister was so well known, that not only his family but the whole country rang with horror at the dastardly crime, and it was fervently hoped that before long the murderer would be arrested, and receive the punishment which he so justly merited.

On a certain evening, about a fortnight after this event, as I was walking slowly down Welbeck Street, and was just about to pass the door of *Mme. Koluchy's* splendid mansion, I saw a young girl come down the steps. She was dressed in deep mourning, and glanced around from right to left, evidently searching for a passing hansom. Her face arrested me; her eyes met mine, and, with a slight cry, she took a step forward.

"You are Mr. Head?" she exclaimed.

"And you are Vivien Delacour," I replied. "I am glad to meet you again. Don't you remember the Hotel Bellevue at Brussels?"

When I spoke her name she coloured perceptibly and began to tremble. Suddenly putting out one of her hands, she laid it on my arm.

“I am glad to see you again,” she said, in a whisper. “You know of our Ñ our most terrible tragedy?”

“I do,” I replied.

“Mother is completely prostrated from the shock. The murder was so sudden and mysterious. If it were not for *Mme.* ÑÑ”

Mme. Koluchy?” I queried.

“Yes, Mr. Head; *Mme.* Koluchy, the best and dearest friend we have in the world. She was attending mother professionally at the time of the murder, and since then has been with her daily. On that first terrible day she scarcely left us. I don’t know what we should have done were it not for her great tact and kindness. She is full of suggestions, too, for the capture of the wretch who took my dear father’s life.”

“You look shaken yourself,” I said; “ought you to be out alone at this hour?”

“I have just seen Madame with a message from mother, and am waiting here for a hansom. If you would be so kind as to call one, I should be much indebted to you.”

“Can I do anything to help you, Vivien?” I said; “you know you have only to command me.”

A hansom drew up at the pavement as I spoke. Vivien’s sad grey eyes were fixed on my face.

“Find the man who killed my father,” she said; “we shall never rest until we know who took his life.”

“May I call at your house to-morrow morning?” I asked suddenly.

“If you will be satisfied with seeing me. Mother will admit no one to her presence but *Mme.* Koluchy.”

“I will come to see you then; expect me at eleven.”

I helped Miss Delacour into her hansom, gave directions to the driver, and she was quickly bowled out of sight.

On my way home many thoughts coursed through my brain. A year ago the Delacours, a family of the name of Pitsey, and I had made friends when travelling through Belgium. The Pitseys, of old Italian origin, owned a magnificent place not far from Tunbridge Wells Ñ the Pitseys and the Delacours were distant cousins. Vivien at that time was only sixteen, and she and I became special chums. She used to tell me all about her ambitions and hopes, and in particular descanted on the museum of rare curios which her cousins, the Pitseys, possessed at their splendid place, Pitsey Hall. I had a standing invitation to visit the Hall at any time when I happened to have leisure, but up to the present had not availed myself of it. Memories of that gay time thronged upon me as I hurried to my own house, but mixed with the old reminiscences was an inconceivable sensation of horror. Why was *Mme.* Koluchy a friend of the Delacours? My mind had got into such a disordered state that I, more or less, associated her with any crime which was committed. Hating myself for what I considered pure morbidness, I arrived at my own house. There I was told that Dufrayer was waiting to see me. I hurried into my study to greet him; he came eagerly forward.

“Have you any news?” I cried.

“If you allude to Delacour’s murder, I have,” he answered.

“Then, pray speak quickly,” I said.

“Well,” he continued, “a curious development, and one which may have the most profoundly important bearing on the murder, has just taken place Ñ it is in connection with it that I have come to see you.” Dufrayer stood up as he spoke. He never liked to be interrupted, and I listened attentively without uttering a syllable. “Yesterday,” he continued, “a man was arrested on suspicion. He was examined this morning before the magistrate at Dow Street. His name is Walter Hunt Ñ he is the keeper of a small marine store at Houndsditch. For several nights he has been found hovering in a suspicious manner round the Delacours’ house. On being questioned he could give no straightforward account of himself, and the police thought it best to arrest him. On his person was discovered an

envelope, addressed to himself, bearing the City post-mark and the date of the day the murder was committed. Inside the envelope was an absolutely blank sheet of paper. Thinking this might be a communication of importance it was submitted to George Lambert, the Government expert at Scotland Yard, for examination Ñ he subjected it to every known test in order to see if it contained any writing on sympathetic ink, or some other secret cipher principles. The result is absolutely negative, and Lambert firmly declares that it is a blank sheet of paper and of no value. I heard all these particulars from Ford, the superintendent in charge of the case; and knowing of your knowledge of chemistry, and the quantity of odds and ends of curious information you possess on these matters, I obtained leave that you should come with me to Scotland Yard and submit the paper to any further tests you know of. I felt sure you would be willing to do this.”

“Certainly,” I replied; “shall I come with you now?”

“I wish you would. If the paper contains any hidden cipher, the sooner it is known the better.”

“One moment first,” I said. “I have just met Vivien Delacour. She was coming out of *Mme. Koluchy’s* house. It is strange how that woman gets to know all one’s friends and acquaintances.”

“I forgot that you knew the Delacours,” said Dufrayer.

“A year ago,” I replied, “I seemed to know them well. When we were in Brussels we were great friends. Vivien looked ill and in great trouble Ñ I would give the world to help her; but I earnestly wish she did not know Madame. It may be morbidness on my part, but lately I never hear of any crime being committed in London without instantly associating *Mme. Koluchy* with it. She has got that girl more or less under her spell, and Vivien herself informed me that she visits her mother daily. Be assured of this, Dufrayer, the woman is after no good.”

As I spoke I saw the lawyer’s face darken, and the cold, hard expression I knew so well came into it, but he did not speak a word.

“I am at your service now,” I said. “Just let me go to my laboratory first. I have some valuable notes on these ciphers which I will take with me.”

A moment later Dufrayer and I found ourselves in a hansom on our way to

Scotland Yard. There we were met by Superintendent Ford, and also by George Lambert, a particularly intelligent-looking man who favoured me with a keen glance from under shaggy brows.

“I have heard of you, Mr. Head,” he said courteously, “and shall be only too pleased if you can discover what I have failed to do. The sheet of paper in question is the sort on which ciphers are often written, but all my re-agents have failed to produce the slightest effect. My fear is that they may possibly have destroyed the cipher should such a thing exist.”

“That is certainly possible,” I said; “but if you will take me to your laboratory I will submit the paper to some rather delicate tests of my own.”

The expert at once led the way, and Dufrayer, Superintendent Ford, and I followed him. When we reached the laboratory, Lambert put all possible tests at my disposal. A glance at the stain on the paper before me showed that cobalt, copper, etc., had been already applied. These tests had, in all probability, nullified any further chemical tests I might try, and had destroyed the result, even if there were some secret writing on the paper.

I spent some time trying the more delicate and less-known tests, with no success. Presently I rose to my feet.

“It is useless,” I said; “I can do nothing with this paper. It is rather a presumption on my part to attempt it after you, Mr. Lambert, have given your ultimatum. I am inclined to agree with you that the paper is valueless.”

Lambert bowed, and a look of satisfaction crept over his face. Dufrayer and I soon afterwards took our leave. As we did so, I heard my friend utter a quick sigh.

“We are only beating the air as yet,” he said. “We must trust that justice and right will win the day at last.”

He parted from me at the corner of the street, and I returned to my own house.

On the following day, at the appointed hour, I went to see Vivien Delacour. She received me in her mother’s boudoir. Here the blinds were partly down, and the whole room had a desolate aspect. The young girl herself looked pale and sad, years older than she had done in the happy days at Brussels.

“Mother was pleased when I told her that I met you yesterday,” she exclaimed. “Sit down, won’t you, Mr. Head? You and my father were great friends during that happy time at the Bellevue. Yes, I feel certain of your sympathy.”

“You may be assured of it,” I said, “and I earnestly wish I could give you more than sympathy. Would it be too painful to give me some particulars in connection with the murder?”

She shuddered quite perceptibly.

“You must have read all there is to know in the newspapers,” she said; “I can tell you nothing more. My father left us on that dreadful day to attend a Cabinet meeting at Downing Street. He never returned home. The police look in vain for the murderer. There seems no motive for the horrible crime Ñ father had no enemies.”

Here the poor girl sobbed without restraint. I allowed her grief to have its way for a few moments, then I spoke.

“Listen, Vivien,” I said; “I promise you that I will not leave a stone unturned to discover the man or woman who killed your father, but you must help me by being calm and self-collected. Grief like this is quite natural, but it does no good to any one. Try, my dear girl, to compose yourself. You say there was no motive for the crime, but surely some important memoranda were stolen from your father?”

“His pocket-book in which he often made notes was removed, but nothing more, neither his watch nor his money. Surely no one would murder him for the sake of securing that pocket-book, Mr. Head?”

“It is possible,” I answered gloomily. “The memoranda contained in the book may have held clues to Government secrets, remember.”

Vivien looked as if she scarcely understood. Once more my thoughts travelled to *Mme. Koluchy*. She was a strange woman Ñ she dealt in colossal crimes. Her influence permeated society through and through. With her a life more or less was not of the slightest consequence. And this terrible woman, whom, up to the present, the laws of England could not touch, was the intimate friend of the young girl by my side!

Vivien moved uneasily, and presently rose.

“I am glad you are going to help us,” she said, looking at me earnestly. “Madame does all she can, but we cannot have too many friends on our side, and we are all aware of your wisdom, Mr. Head. Why do you not consult Madame?”

I shook my head.

“But you are friends, are you not? I told her only this morning how I had met you.”

“We are acquaintances, but not friends,” I replied.

“Indeed, you astonish me. You cannot imagine how useful she is, and how many suggestions she throws out. By the way, mother and I leave London to-day.”

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Away from here. It is quite too painful to remain any longer in this house. The shock has completely shattered mother’s nerves, and she is now under *Mme.* Koluchy’s care. Madame has just taken a house in the country called Frome Manor Ñ it is not far from our cousins, the Pitseys Ñ you remember them? You met them in Brussels.”

I nodded.

“We are going there to-day,” continued Vivien. “Of course we shall see no one, but mother will be under the same roof with Madame, and thus will have the benefit of her treatment day and night.”

Soon afterwards I took my leave. All was suspicion and uncertainty, and no definite clue had been obtained.

About this time I began to be haunted by an air which had sprung like a mushroom into popularity. It was called the “Queen Waltz,” and it was scarcely possible to pick up a dance programme without seeing it. There was something fascinating about its swinging measure, its almost dreamy refrain, and its graceful alternations of harmony and unison. No one knew who had really composed it, and still less did any one for a moment dream that its pleasant chords contained a dark or subtle meaning. As I listened to it on more than one

occasion, at more than one concert Ñ for I am a passionate lover of music, and seldom spend an afternoon without listening to it Ñ I little guessed all that the “Queen Waltz” would bring forth. I was waiting for a clue. How could I tell that all too late and by such unlikely means it would be put into my hands?

A month and even six weeks went by, and although the police were unceasing in their endeavours to gain a trace of the murderer, they were absolutely unsuccessful. Once or twice during this interval I had letters from Vivien Delacour. She wrote with the passion and impetuosity of a very young girl. She was anxious about her mother, who was growing steadily weaker, and was losing her self-restraint more and more as the long weeks glided by. *Mme.* Koluchy was anxious about her. Madame’s medicines, her treatment, her soothing powers, were on this occasion destitute of results.

“Nothing will rest her,” said Vivien, in conclusion, “until the murderer is discovered. She dreams of him night after night. During the daytime she is absolutely silent, or she paces the room in violent agitation, crying out to God to help her to discover him. Oh, Mr. Head, what is to be done?”

The child’s letters appealed to me strongly. I was obliged to answer her with extreme care, as I knew that Madame would see what I wrote; but none the less were all my faculties at work on her behalf. From time to time I thought of the mysterious blank sheet of paper. Was it possible that it contained a cipher? Was one of those old, incomparable, magnificent undiscovered ciphers which belonged to the ancient Brotherhood really concealed beneath its blank surface? That blank sheet of paper mingled with my dreams and worried me during my wakeful hours. I became nearly as restless as Vivien herself, and when a letter of a more despairing nature than usual arrived on a certain morning towards the end of February, I felt that I could no longer remain inactive. I would answer Vivien’s letter in person. To do so I had but to accept my standing invitation to Pitsey Hall. I wrote, therefore, to my friend, Leonardo Pitsey, suggesting that if it were convenient to him and his wife I should like to go to Pitsey Hall on the following Saturday.

The next afternoon Pitsey himself called to see me.

“I received your letter this morning, and having to come to town to-day, thought I would look you up,” he cried. “I have to catch a train at 5.30, so cannot stay a minute. We shall be delighted to welcome you at the Hall. My wife and I have

never forgotten you, Head. You will be, I assure you, a most welcome guest. By the way, have you heard of our burglary?"

"No," I answered.

"You do not read your paper, then. It is an extraordinary affair Ñ crime seems to be in the very air just now. The Hall was attacked by burglars last week Ñ a most daring and cunningly planned affair. Some plate was stolen, but the plate-chest, built on the newest principles, was untampered with. There was a desperate attempt made, however, to get into the large drawing-room, where all our valuable curios are kept. Druco, the mastiff, who is loose about the house at night, was found poisoned outside the drawing-room door. Luckily the butler awoke in time, gave the alarm, and the rascals bolted. The country police have been after them, and in despair I have come up to Scotland Yard and engaged a couple of their best detectives. They come down with me to-night, and I trust we shall soon get the necessary clue to the capture of the burglars. My fear is that if they are not arrested they will try again, for, I assure you, the old place is worth robbing. But, there, I ought not to worry you about my domestic concerns. We shall have a gay party on Saturday, for my eldest boy Ottavio comes of age next week, and the event is to be celebrated by a great ball in his honour."

"How are the Delacours?" I interrupted.

"Vivien keeps fairly well, but her mother is a source of great anxiety. *Mme.* Koluchy and Vivien are constant guests at the Hall. The Delacours return to town before the ball, but Madame will attend it. It will be an honour and a great attraction to have such a lioness for the occasion. Do you know her, Head? She is quite charming."

"I have met her," I replied.

"Ah! that is capital; you and she are just the sort to hit it off. It's all right, then, and we shall expect you. A good train leaves Charing Cross at 4.30. I will send the trap to meet you."

"Thank you," I answered. "I shall be glad to come to Pitsey Hall, but I do not know that I can stay as long as the night of the ball."

"Once we get you into our clutches, Head, we won't let you go; my young people are all anxious to renew their acquaintance with you. Don't you

remember little Antonia Ñ my pretty songstress, as I call her? Vivien, too, talks of you as one of her greatest friends. Poor child! I pity her from my heart. She is a sweet, gentle girl; but such a shock as she has sustained may leave its mark for life. Poor Delacour Ñ the very best of men. The fact is this: I should like to postpone the ball on account of the Delacours, although they are very distant cousins; but Ottavio only comes of age once in his life, and, under the circumstances, we feel that we must go through with it. ‘Pon my word, Head, when I think of that poor child and her mother, I have little heart for festivities. However, that is neither here nor there Ñ we shall expect you on Saturday.”

As Pitsey spoke, he took up his hat.

“I must be off now,” he said, “for I have to meet the two detectives at Charing Cross by appointment.”

On the following Saturday, the 27th, I arrived at Pitsey Hall, where a warm welcome awaited me. The ball was to be on the following Tuesday, the 2nd of March. There was a large house party, and the late burglary was still the topic of conversation.

After dinner, when the ladies had left the dining-room, Pitsey and I drew our chairs together, and presently the conversation drifted to Mrs. Delacour, the mysterious murder, and *Mme. Koluchy*.

“The police are completely nonplussed,” said Pitsey. “I doubt if the man who committed that rascally crime will ever be brought to justice. I was speaking to Madame on the subject to-day, and although she was very hopeful when she first arrived at Frome Manor, she is now almost inclined to agree with me. By the way, Mrs. Delacour’s state is most alarming Ñ she loses strength hour by hour.”

“I can quite understand that,” I replied. “If the murderer were discovered it would be an immense relief to her.”

“So Madame says. I know she is terribly anxious about her patient. By the way, knowing that she was an acquaintance of yours, I asked her here to-night, but unfortunately she had another engagement which she could not postpone. What a wonderfully well-informed woman she is! She spent hours at the Hall this morning examining my curios; she gave me information about some of them which was news to me, but she has been many times now round my collection. It is a positive treat to talk with any one so intelligent, and if she were not so keen

about my Venetian goblet Ñ ÑÑ”

“What!” I interrupted, “the goblet you spoke to me about in Brussels, the one which has been in your family since 1500?”

“The same,” he answered, nodding his head, and lowering his voice a trifle. “It has been in the family, as you say, since 1500. Madame has shown bad taste in the matter, and I am surprised at her.”

“Pray explain yourself,” I said.

“She first saw it last November, when she came here with the Delacours. I shall never forget her stare of astonishment. She stood perfectly still for at least two minutes, gazing at it without speaking. When she turned round at last she was as white as a ghost, and asked me where I got it from. I told her, and she offered me £10,000 for it on the spot.”

“A large figure,” I remarked.

“I was much annoyed,” continued Pitsey, “and told her I would not sell it at any price.”

“Did she give any reason for wishing to obtain it?”

“Yes, she said she had a goblet very like it in her own collection, and wished to purchase this one in order to complete one of the most unique collections of old Venetian glass in England. The woman must be fabulously rich, or even her passion for curios would not induce her to offer so preposterous a sum. Since her residence at Frome Manor she has been constantly here, and still takes, I can see, the deepest interest in the goblet, often remarking about it. She says it has got a remarkably pure musical note, very clear and distinct. But come, Head, you would like to see it. We will go into the drawing-room, and I will show it to you.”

As Pitsey spoke he rose and led me through the great central hall into the inner drawing-room, a colossal apartment supported by Corinthian pillars and magnificently decorated.

“As you know, the goblet has been in our family for many centuries,” he went on, “and we call it, from Uhland’s ballad of the old Cumberland tradition, ‘The

Luck of Pitsey Hall.' You know Longfellow's translation, of course? Here it is, Head. Is it not a wonderful piece of work? Have a close look at it, it is worth examining."

The goblet in question stood about 6ft. from the ground on a pedestal of solid malachite, which was placed in a niche in the wall. One glance was sufficient to show me that it was a gem of art. The cup, which was 8 in. in diameter, was made of thin glass of a pale ruby colour. Some mystical letters were etched on the outside of the glass, small portions of which could be seen; but screening them from any closer interpretation was some twisted fancy work, often to be observed on old Venetian goblets. If by any chance this fancy work were chipped off the letters would be plainly visible. The cup itself was supported on an openwork stem richly gilt and enamelled with coloured filigree work, the whole supported again on a base set with opal, agate, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and pearl. From the centre of the cup, and in reality supporting it, was a central column of pale green glass which bore what was apparently some heraldic design. Stepping up close I tapped the cup gently with my finger. It gave out, as Pitsey had described, a note of music singularly sweet and clear. I then proceeded to examine the stem, and saw at once that the design formed a row of separate crowns. Scarcely knowing why, I counted them. There were seven! A queer suspicion crept over me. The sequence of late events passed rapidly through my mind, and a strange relationship between circumstances apparently having no connection began to appear. I turned to Pitsey.

"Can you tell me how this goblet came into your possession?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied; "the legend which is attached to the goblet is this. We are, as you know, descended from an old Italian family, the Pizzis, our present name being merely an Anglicized corruption of the Italian. My children and I still bear Italian Christian names, as you know, and our love for the old country amounts almost to a passion. The Pizzis were great people in Venice in the sixteenth century; at that time the city had an immense fame for its beautiful glass, the manufacturers forming a guild, and the secret being jealously kept. It was during this time that Catherine de Medici by her arbitrary and tyrannical administration roused the opposition of a Catholic party, at whose head was the Duke of Alenon, her own fourth son. Among the Duke's followers was my ancestor, Giovanni Pizzi. It was discovered that an order had been sent by Catherine de Medici to one of the manufacturers at Venice to construct that very goblet which you see there. After its construction it was for some secret purpose

sent to the laboratory of an alchemist in Venice, where it was seized by Giovanni Pizzi, and has been handed down in our family ever since.”

“But what is the meaning of the seven crowns on the stem?” I asked.

“That I cannot tell. They have probably no special significance.”

I thought otherwise, but kept my ideas to myself.

We turned away. A beautiful young voice was filling the old drawing-room with sweetness. I went up to the piano to listen to Antonia Pitsey, while she sang an Italian song as only one who had Italian blood in her veins could.

Antonia was a beautiful girl, dark, with luminous eyes and an air of distinction about her.

“I wish you would tell me something about your friend Vivien,” I said, as she rose from the piano.

“Oh, Mr. Head, I am so unhappy about her,” was the low reply. “I see her very often Ñ she is altogether changed; and as to Mrs. Delacour, the shock has been so sudden, so terrible, that I doubt if she will ever recover. Mr. Head, I am so glad you have come. Vivien constantly speaks of you. She wants to see you to-morrow.”

“Is she coming here?”

“No, but you can meet her in the park. She has sent you a message. To-morrow is Sunday. Vivien is not going to church. May I take you to the rendezvous?”

I promised, and soon afterwards the evening came to an end.

That night I was haunted by three main thoughts: the old Italian legend of the goblet; the seven crowns, symbolic of the Brotherhood of the Seven Kings; and, finally, Madame’s emotion when she first saw it, and her strong desire to obtain it. I wondered had the burglary been committed by her instigation? Sleep I could not, my brain was too active and busy. I was certain there was mischief ahead, but try as I would I could only lose myself in strange conjectures.

The following day I met Miss Delacour, as arranged, in the park. Antonia

brought me to her, and then left us together. The young girl's worn face, the pathetic expression in her large grey eyes, her evident nervousness and want of self-control all appealed to me to a terrible degree. She asked me eagerly if any fresh clue had been obtained with regard to the murderer. I shook my head.

"If something is not done soon, mother will lose her senses," she remarked. "Even *Mme. Koluchy* is in despair about her. All her ordinary modes of treatment fail in mother's case, and the strangest thing is that mother has begun to take a most queer and unaccountable dislike to Madame herself. She says that Madame's presence in the room gives her an uncontrollable feeling of nervousness. This has become so bad that mother and I return to town to-morrow; my cousin's house is too gay for us at present, and mother refuses to stay any longer under *Mme. Koluchy's* roof."

"But why?" I asked.

"That I cannot explain to you. For my part, I think Madame one of the best women on earth. She has been kindness itself to us, and I do not know what we should have done without her."

I did not speak, and Vivien continued, after a pause:

"Mother's conduct makes Madame strangely unhappy. She told me so, and I pity her from my heart. We had a long talk on the subject yesterday. That was just before she began to speak of the goblet, and before Mr. Lewisham arrived."

"Mr. Lewisham Ñ who is he?" I asked.

"A great friend of Madame's. He comes to see her almost daily. He is very handsome, and I like him, but I did not know she was expecting him yesterday. She and I were in the drawing-room. She spoke of mother, and then alluded to the goblet, the one at the Hall. You have seen it, of course, Mr. Head?"

I nodded Ñ I was too much interested to interrupt the girl by words.

"My cousins call it 'The Luck of Pitsey Hall.' Well, Madame has set her heart on obtaining it, and she has gone to the length of offering Cousin Leonardo ten thousand pounds for it."

"Mr. Pitsey told me last night that Madame had offered an enormous sum for the

vase,” I said; “but it is useless, as he has no intention of selling.”

“I told Madame so,” replied Vivien. “I know well what value my cousins place upon the old glass. I believe they think that their luck would really go if anything happened to it.”

“Heaven forbid!” I replied involuntarily; “it is a perfect gem of its kind.”

“I know! I know! I never saw Madame so excited and unreasonable about anything. She begged of me to use my influence to try and get my cousin to let her have it. When I assured her that it was useless, she looked more annoyed than I had ever seen her. She took up a book, and pretended to read. I went and sat behind one of the curtains, near a window. The next moment Mr. Lewisham was announced. He came eagerly up to Madame Ñ I don’t think he saw me.

“‘Well!’ he cried; ‘any success? Have you secured it yet? If you have, we are absolutely safe. Has that child helped you?’

“I guessed that they were talking about me, and started up and disclosed myself. Madame did not take the slightest notice, but she motioned to Mr. Lewisham to come into another room. What can it all mean, Mr. Head?”

“That I cannot tell you, Vivien; but may I ask you one thing?”

“Certainly you may.”

“Will you promise me to keep what you have just told me a secret from anybody else? I allude to Madame’s anxiety to obtain the old goblet. There may be nothing in what I ask, or there may be much. Will you do this?”

“Of course I will. How queer you look!”

I made no remark, and soon afterwards took my leave of her.

Late that same evening, Antonia Pitsey received a note from Vivien, in which she said that *Mme.* Koluchy, her mother, and herself were returning to town by an early train the following morning. The Delacours did not intend to come back to Frome Manor, but Madame would do so on Tuesday in order to be in time for the great ball. She was going to town now in order to be present at an early performance of “For the Crown” at the Lyceum, having secured a box on the

grand tier for the occasion.

This note was commented on without any special interest being attached to it, but restless already, I now quickly made up my mind. I also would go up to town on the following day; I also would return to Pitsey Hall in time for the ball.

Accordingly, at an early hour on the following day, I found myself in Dufrayer's office.

"I tell you what it is," I said, "there is some plot deeper than we think brewing. Madame took Frome Manor after the murder of Delacour. She would not do so without a purpose. She is willing to spend ten thousand pounds in order to secure a goblet of old Venetian glass, which is one of the curios at Pitsey Hall. A man called Lewisham, who doubtless bears another alias, is in her confidence. Madame returns to town to-night with a definite motive, I have not the slightest doubt."

"This is all very well, Norman," replied Dufrayer, "but what we want are facts. You will lose your senses if you go on building up fantastic ideas. Madame comes up to town and is going to the Lyceum; at least, so you tell me?"

"Yes."

"And you mean to follow her to see if she has any designs on Forbes Robertson or Mrs. Patrick Campbell?"

"I mean to follow her," I replied gravely. "I mean to see what sort of man Lewisham is. It is possible that I may have seen him before."

Dufrayer shrugged his shoulders and turned away somewhat impatiently. As he did so a wild thought suddenly struck me.

"What would you say," I cried, "if I suggested an idea to force Madame to divulge some clue to us?"

"My dear Norman, I should say that your fancies are getting the better of your reason, that is all."

"Now listen to me," I said. I sat down beside Dufrayer. "I have an idea which may serve us well. It is, of course, a bare chance, and if you like you may call it

the conception of a madman. Madame goes to the Lyceum to-night. She occupies a box on the grand tier. In all probability Lewisham will accompany her. Dufrayer, you and I will also be at the theatre, and, if possible, we will take a box on the second tier exactly opposite to hers. I will bring Robertson, the principal and the trainer of the new deaf and dumb college, with me. I happen to know him well."

Dufrayer stared at me with some alarm in his face.

"Don't you see?" I went on excitedly. "Robertson is a master of the art of lip language. We will keep him in the back of the box. About the middle of the play, and in one of the intervals when the electric light is full on, we will send a note to Madame's box saying that the cipher on the blank sheet of paper has been read. The note will pretend to be an anonymous warning to her. We shall watch her, and by means of Robertson hear Ñ yes, hear Ñ what she says. Robertson will watch her through opera-glasses, and he will be able to understand every word she speaks, just as you or I could if we were in her box beside her. The whole thing is a bare chance, I know, but we may learn something by taking her unsuspecting and unawares."

Dufrayer thought for a minute, then he sprang to his feet.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "Head, you are an extraordinary man! It is a unique idea. I will go off to the box-office at once and take a box if possible opposite Madame, or, failing that, the best seats we can get. I only hope you can secure Robertson. Go to his house at once and offer him any fee he wants. This is detection carried to a fine art with a vengeance. If successful, I shall class you as the smartest criminal agent of the day. We both meet at the Lyceum at a quarter to eight. Now, there is not a moment to lose."

I drove down to Robertson's house in Brompton, found him at home, and told him my wish. I strongly impressed upon him that if he would help he would be aiding in the cause of justice. He became keenly interested, entered fully into the situation, and refused to accept any fee.

At the appointed hour we met Dufrayer at the theatre door, and learned that he had secured a box on the second tier directly opposite *Mme.* Koluchy's box on the grand tier. I had arranged to have my letter sent by a messenger at ten o'clock.

We took our seats, and a few moments later *Mme. Koluchy*, in rose-coloured velvet and blazing with diamonds, accompanied by a tall, dark, clean-shaven man, entered her box. I drew back into the shadow of my own box and watched her. She bowed to one or two acquaintances in the stalls, then sat down, leaning her arm on the plush-covered edge of her box.

Robertson never took his eyes off her, and I felt reassured as he repeated to us the chance bits of conversation that he could catch between her and her companion.

The play began, and a few minutes past ten, in one of the intervals, I saw Madame turn and receive my note, with a slight gesture of surprise. She tore it open and her face paled perceptibly. Robertson, as I had instructed him, stood in front of me – his opera-glasses were fixed on the faces of Madame and her companion. I watched Madame as she read the note; she then handed it to Lewisham, who read it also. They looked at each other, and I saw Madame's lips moving. Simultaneously, Robertson began to make the following report verbatim: –

“Impossible... some trick... quite safe goblet... key to cipher... to-morrow night.”

Then followed a pause.

“Life and death to us.... Signed.... My name.”

There was another long pause, and I saw Madame twist the paper nervously in her fingers. I looked at Dufrayer, our eyes met. My heart was beating. His face had become drawn and grey. The ghastly truth and the explanation were slowly sealing their impress on our brains. The darkness of doubt had lifted, the stunning truth was clear. The paper which had defied us was a cipher written by Madame in her own name, and doubtless implicated her with Delacour's murder. Her anxiety to secure the goblet was very obvious. In some subtle way, handed down, doubtless, through generations, the goblet once in the possession of the ancient Brotherhood had held the key of the secret cipher.

But to-morrow night! To-morrow night was the night of the ball, and Madame was to be there. The reasoning was so obvious that the chain of evidence struck Dufrayer and me simultaneously.

We immediately left the theatre. There was one thing to be done, and that without delay. I must catch the first train in the morning to Pitsey Hall, examine the goblet afresh, and tell Pitsey everything, and thus secure and protect the goblet from harm. If possible, I would myself discover the key to the cipher, which, if our reasoning was true, would place Madame in a felon's dock and see the end of the Brotherhood.

At ten o'clock the following morning I reached Pitsey Hall. When I arrived I found, as I expected, the house in more or less confusion. Pitsey was busily engaged superintending arrangements and directing the servants in their work. It was some little time before I could see him alone.

"What is the matter, my dear fellow?" he said. "I am very busy now."

"Come into the library and I will tell you," I replied.

As soon as ever we were alone I unfolded my story. Hardened by years of contact with the world, it was difficult to startle or shake the composure of Leonardo Pitsey, and before I had finished my strange tale I could see from his expression the difficulty I should have in convincing him of the truth.

"I have had my suspicions for a long time," I said, in conclusion. "These are not the first dealings I have had with *Mme. Koluchy*. Hitherto she has eluded all my efforts to get her within the arm of the law, but I believe her time is near. Pitsey, your goblet is in danger. You will remove it to some place of safety?"

"Remove the luck of Pitsey Hall on the night when my boy comes of age!" replied Pitsey, frowning as he spoke. "It is good of you to be interested, Head; but really Ñ well, I never knew you were such an imaginative man! As to any accident taking place to-night, that is quite outside the realms of probability. The band will be placed in front of the goblet, and it is impossible for anything to happen to it, as none of the dancers can come near it. Now, have you anything more to say?"

"I beg of you to be guided by me and to put the goblet into a place of safety," I repeated. "You don't suppose I would try to scare you with a cock-and-bull story. There is reason in what I say. I know that woman, my uneasiness is far more than due to mere imagination."

"To please you, Head, I will place two of my footmen beside the goblet during

the ball, in order to prevent the slightest chance of any one approaching it. There, will that satisfy you?"

I was obliged to bow my acquiescence, and Pitsey soon left me in order to attend to his multifarious duties.

I spent nearly an hour that morning examining the goblet afresh. The mystical writing on the cup, concealed by the openwork design, engrossed my most careful attention, but so well were the principal letters concealed by the outside ornaments, that I could make nothing of them. Was I, after all, entirely mistaken, or did this beautiful work of art contain hidden within itself the power for which I longed, the strange key to the mysterious paper which would convict *Mme. Koluchy* of a capital charge?

The evening came at last, and about nine the guests began to arrive. The first dance had hardly come to an end before *Mme. Koluchy* appeared on the scene. She wore a dress of cloth of silver, and her appearance caused an almost imperceptible lull in the dancing and conversation. As she walked slowly up the great ballroom on the arm of a county magnate all eyes turned to look at her. She passed me with a hardening about the corners of her mouth as she acknowledged my bow, and I fancy I saw her eyes wander in the direction of the goblet at the other end of the room. Soon afterwards Antonia Pitsey came to my side.

"How beautiful everything is," she said. "Did you ever see any one look quite so lovely as Madame? Her dress to-night gives her a regal appearance. Have you seen our dance programme? The 'Queen Waltz' will be played just after supper."

"So you have fallen a victim to the popular taste?" I answered. "I hear that waltz everywhere."

"But you don't know who has composed it?" said the girl, with an arch look. "Now, I don't mind confiding in you Ñ it is *Mme. Koluchy*."

I could not help starting.

"I was unaware that she was a musician," I remarked.

"She is, and a most accomplished one. We have included the waltz in our programme by her special request. I am so glad; it is the most lively and inspiring air I ever danced to."

Antonia was called away, and I leant against the wall, too ill at ease to dance or take any active part in the revels of the hour. The moments flew by, and at last the festive and brilliant notes of the “Queen Waltz” sounded on my ears. Couples came thronging into the ballroom as soon as this most fascinating melody was heard. To listen to its seductive measures was enough to make your feet tingle and your heart beat. Once again I watched *Mme. Koluchy* as she moved through the throng. Ottavio Pitsey, the hero of the evening, was now her partner. There was a slight colour in her usually pale checks, and I had never seen her look more beautiful. I was standing not far from the band, and could not help noticing how the dominant note, repeated in two bars when all the instruments played together in harmony, rang out with a peculiar and almost passionate insistence. Suddenly, without a moment’s warning, and with a clap that struck the dancers motionless, a loud crash rang through the room. The music instantly ceased, and the priceless heirloom of the Pitseys lay in a thousand silvered splinters on the polished floor. There was a moment’s pause of absolute silence, followed by a sharp cry from our host, and then a hum of voices as the dancers hurried towards the scene of the disaster. The consternation and dismay were indescribable. Pitsey, with a face like death, was gazing horror-struck at the base and stem of the vase which still kept their place on the malachite stand, the cup alone being shivered to fragments. The two footmen, who had been standing under the pedestal, looked as if they had been struck by an unseen hand. Pushing my way almost roughly through the crowded throng I reached the spot. Nothing remained but the stem and jewelled base of the goblet.

“The two footmen ... looked as if they had been struck by an unseen hand.”

Silent and gazing at the throng as one in a dream stood *Mme. Koluchy*. Antonia had crept up close to her father; her face was as white as her dress.

“The Luck of Pitsey Hall,” she murmured, “and on this night of all nights!”

As for me, I felt my brain almost reeling with excitement. For the moment the thoughts which surged through it numbed my capacity for speech. I saw a servant gathering up the fragments. The evening was ended, and the party gradually broke up. To go on dancing would have been impossible.

It was not till some hours afterwards that the whole Satanic scheme burst upon me. The catastrophe admitted of but one explanation. The dominant note, repeated in two bars when all the instruments played together in harmony, must

have been the note accordant with that of the cup of the goblet, and by the well-known laws of acoustics, when so played it shattered the goblet.

Next day there was an effort made to piece together the shattered fragments, but some were missing Ñ how removed, by whom taken, no one could ever tell. Beyond doubt the characters cunningly concealed by the openwork pattern contained the key to the cipher. But once again Madame had escaped. The ingenuity, the genius, of the woman placed her beyond the ordinary consequences of crime.

Delacour's murder still remains unavenged. Will the truth ever come to light?

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