THE FIRST AMERICAN KING



BY

GEORGE · GORDON · HASTINGS

The First American King

BY

George Gordon Hastings



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THE SENSATION OF THE DAY

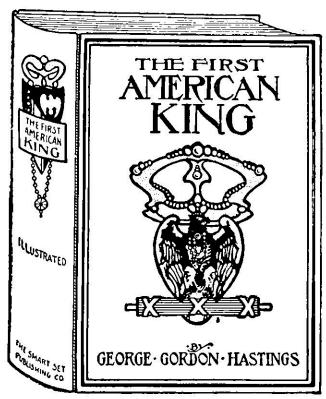
The First American King

A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE

By George Gordon Hastings

"The message of the book, based on present sociological and political tendencies, is that the United States will be a monarchy long before this century has run its course. That is what Imperialism means to Mr. Hastings. Yet the story is one of adventure, and through its pages runs a very pretty romance."—*Town Topics.*

Discussion of the growth of American Imperialism is rife in the clubs and salons of Paris, and a surprisingly common opinion is that the United States will sooner or later become an empire. Those who hold this view find their justification not only in our political tendencies but in the very spirit of the American people, which year by year seems to drift farther from democratic simplicity and nearer to class distinction and title-worship. The appearance of a second edition of an Americanized "Burke's Peerage" on this side of the water is pointed to as a strong indication of this change in national sentiment. The tendency is recognized among ourselves, and is an open prediction, in the form of a novel, of the impending change in our form of government.



The book is an alarming prophecy and a convincing one, while the romantic plot holds the interest tense from start to finish.

The novel recounts the adventures of a present-day scientist and detective, who wake up in the latter part of this century to find our republic an absolute monarchy with a crowned king and titled nobility. They are at once swept into the intrigues of the Court at Oldport, and become principal actors in a series of events which lead to a tremendous climax. A double love affair among our "descendants" in itself makes a very charming story, and in many of the characters we recognize people prominent in the society and politics of our own day.

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BOOK I

THE CAVE OF WHISPERS

CHAPTER I

DR. BELDEN'S ESTABLISHMENT

The establishment of Dr. James Belden was pleasantly situated upon the southern shore of Long Island, some ninety odd miles from the city. The spacious house was fitted with every modern convenience and comfort, and stood in extensive, well-wooded private grounds. There were good fishing and boating to be had and the white, well-kept Long Island roads afforded excellent facilities alike for riding and driving.

The establishment was in reality a cross between a sanatorium and a physical culture resort. The doctor-proprietor carefully examined each person upon arrival and kept his directing eye upon him during his stay. He prescribed the diet and the exercise suited to each case and saw to it personally that his instructions were carried out. Many a wreck of the city's storm and stress had the Doctor sent back to the metropolis renovated and renewed, and many were the haggard devotees of late hours and city dissipation who had returned, after a sojourn at the retreat, with vigor in their limbs and the hue of health in

their cheeks. In a word, the Doctor was a philanthropist, at a hundred a week, who extended a haven of rest for human wrecks and turned them out again on the high seas of life staunchly refitted to renew the struggle. The Doctor himself, in fact, often referred to his establishment as a haven of refuge, which nautical expression was, perhaps, not inapt, inasmuch as the harbor in question was not infrequently visited, in popular parlance, by "swells" and "high-rollers."

Dr. Belden himself was an exceedingly genial person, who well knew how to keep his various guests amused and in good humor with themselves and the world in general. The one subject which disturbed the Doctor's equanimity was the presence in the neighborhood of a recently established private asylum for the insane maintained by a Dr. Weldon. The similarity between the names Weldon and Belden had led upon certain occasions to various distressing and distinctly embarrassing mistakes. Thus, when distinguished visitors had at times mentioned that they were staying at Dr. Belden's establishment, rustics of the neighboring villages had been known to tap their heads significantly and adopt either attitudes of alarm, or patronizing airs, as the case might be. While little Reggie Smithers had been sojourning at Dr. Belden's the rumor had been circulated at his club that he was incarcerated in an asylum for lunatics and a friendly wag had written him a letter of condolence, in which he took occasion to remark parenthetically that he had always entertained an innate conviction that Reggie would eventually so wind up, at which Reggie had been exceedingly wroth and had felt impelled to cut short his stay and return as quickly as possible to the city, so as to give the lie to the rumor.

The early summer of nineteen hundred found the sanatorium fairly well filled with guests, not the least notable among whom was Mr. Thomas Kearns, the widely-famed head of New York's Secret Service Bureau, who had selected this quiet retreat at which to build up his magnificent muscular development and repair the ravages upon his general system incurred by his exciting and somewhat irregular mode of life in the city. To describe Mr. Kearns as widely famed was certainly not overstating the case, for he was conceded to be the ablest detector of crime in the country. So many were the great mysteries which he had unraveled and with so many important cases had he been connected that his fame had stretched far and wide, extending beyond the confines of the United States and reaching into foreign lands. In a word, his reputation was international and his achievements had been lauded in many countries and in many tongues.

His fellow-townsmen of the great metropolis — in fact, his countrymen at large — were proud of Thomas Kearns. When Americans traveling abroad heard of some mystery which the secret police of European capitals were unable to solve, they were wont to smile in a superior way and exclaim: "They ought to send for Kearns over here — our Kearns. He would show them what's what!"

Everybody from the doorman at Police Headquarters to the Police Commissioners and the heads of the city government treated Mr. Kearns with distinguished consideration; he was regarded as one of the Institutions of the city. No one ever dreamed of interfering with Mr. Kearns. And well he justified this trust. Under his administration the criminal classes were kept in a subjection and awe which rendered life and property more secure in

New York than in any other great city of the world. No criminal from other cities dared seek abode in the metropolis without first reporting to Mr. Kearns as to his advent, his place of domicile, the causes of his visit, and the duration of his stay, and no man of criminal record might, under any circumstances, by day or by night, venture to put foot south of Fulton Street, into the great financial centres where the heaped-up wealth of the city was stored.

Possessed of ample means, no breath of suspicion had ever touched Mr. Kearns. The vicissitudes of his calling had enabled him upon many occasions to be of inestimable service to various financial powers, and these powers had gladly placed at his disposal information which had enabled him to build up a handsome private fortune. He was a man of some forty years, of medium height and well-rounded figure, with blue eyes, a ruddy complexion and the general appearance of a prosperous merchant; but the blue eyes had a very keen look at times and the lips a peculiar way of pursing themselves under the heavy, well-kept brown moustache.

It is true that here and there at times it was whispered about that Mr. Kearns' success was largely due to the vast army of informers — "stool pigeons," as they were technically termed — fostered and maintained by him among the criminals themselves, and that in many of his most famous cases the mystery had been solved by confessions procured through the exercise of the mysterious rites of the "third degree." The precise nature of these rites was known to none save the initiated, but it was darkly hinted that, in certain subterranean cells beneath Mr. Kearns' official quarters, tortures were practised beside which the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition paled into insignificance.

As to the truth of these rumors there seemed to be no precise means of ascertaining, but certain it was that Mr. Kearns' methods were eminently successful and — nothing pays like success!

With that easy geniality which was one of his characteristics, within twenty-four hours after his arrival Mr. Kearns was on terms of friendly acquaintance with the various other guests. Most of these were men about town, of various ages, but all suffering from much the same physical troubles, and all possessed of much the same manners, habits and train of thoughts. Of men of this stamp, Mr. Kearns saw enough in the city and they did not particularly interest him. Among these guests, the one who most attracted his interest and attention was Professor Walter Stuart Dean, of Chicago. Professor Dean until recently had filled the chair of Science at Chicago University, but had been forced out because of a book on political economy he had published. Some of the theories set forth in this work were of so advanced and radical a character as to give offense to certain patrons of the Institution. Professor Dean's views were held to be nothing short of an assault upon the sacred Rights of Property. As one obese and influential patron of the seat of learning put it, "Capital stood aghast" at Professor Dean's views. As some one must suffer whenever poor, timid Capital is thrown into a fright, Professor Dean, in spite of his conceded great abilities, was made to pay the penalty.

The Professor, however, accepted the situation with much equanimity. He had succeeded in selling to one of the great cable companies an invention in connection with the transmission of messages and had received quite a goodly sum. This placed him in a position of pecuniary ease so far as the immedi-

ate future was concerned, and he had come to Dr. Belden's establishment to recruit his energies in preparation for the launching of a scientific scheme, very comprehensive and ambitious in its scope, dealing with the question of aërial navigation.

The Professor was a man of some forty-seven years, tall and thin and with that slight stoop of the shoulders peculiar to the student. The face was clean-shaven and pale, with a marked puff of the flesh above each eye where the brows were wont to contract in the intensity of thought. When the firm, well-cut features lighted in a smile, the face became positively handsome. One of the Professor's hobbies, which he was fond of discussing with Mr. Kearns, was the question of the economic condition of the masses of the people. The Professor contended — and it pained his kindly nature that such was the case — that the great mass of the people were not as well-off as they should be; that the true happiness and well-being of the great body of mankind had not advanced in proportion to the world's progress in other directions.

Another pet subject of discussion with the Professor was his theories of aërial navigation. In fact, he declared that he had fully and satisfactorily solved the problem and was prepared in the near future to produce a craft with which the air could be navigated at will, both in safety and at high speed. His plans for this work, he explained, were fully perfected and the completed invention would have been an accomplished fact some time before had he not been hampered by lack of means. But with the funds received from the sale of his electrical device to the cable company he was in possession of sufficient means to put through the work properly, and he intended to devote himself actively to this matter

as soon as his present vacation was over. In the meantime, he had written on the subject of aërial navigation sundry pamphlets which had attracted attention in scientific circles.

At first, Mr. Kearns was disposed to regard Professor Dean's projects in this connection as partaking of the visionary, but as he grew to know him better, the Professor's clear-headedness and conservatism made more and more of an impression upon him and he came to regard aërial navigation, with Professor Dean as its introducer, as not such an unlikely possibility in the near future.

Another acquaintance made by Mr. Kearns was that of Dr. Raoul Jaquet. Dr. Jaquet was not a guest of Dr. Belden's famous establishment, but lived in a cottage of his own some little distance away. He was on friendly terms with Dr. Belden, who spoke of him as a man of remarkable attainments in certain branches of scientific research, notably in chemistry and toxicology. Dr. Jaquet cultivated friendly relations with Professor Dean and Mr. Kearns, and his visits to Dr. Belden's establishment became more frequent than ever. All three were fond of exercise on foot and they took long rambles together over the surrounding country.

Dr. Jaquet, too, had, like Professor Dean, his hobby, and this hobby was the subject of suspended animation. He was a Frenchman some fifty years of age, short and spare of figure, with a complexion dark as if stained with walnut juice, and very black and very curly hair, lightly streaked with gray. He spoke with great volubility, in quick, jerky little sentences whose peculiar idiomatic twists suggested a direct translation from his native French. Upon one occasion, they visited his cottage and he showed them different animals, apparently sound asleep,

which he declared were in various stages of suspended animation. He pointed out a peacefully sleeping dog, and explained that it had been in this condition for sixty-five days without a particle of food or drop of liquid. He also exhibited a rabbit which had been in the same state for four months. All he had to do, the Doctor declared, was to restore them to wakefulness and they would promptly resume their normal condition. Mr. Kearns failed to restrain a mild expression of his skepticism; but the Doctor's voluble protestations forced him to accept the statement of their condition, though he still maintained the animals could either not be aroused at all, or else would drop dead as soon as awakened. The Doctor promptly awakened the rabbit. The animal seemed at first slightly lethargic and dazed, but it quickly vindicated the Doctor's claims by cavorting about its cage and then falling to work, in a businesslike way, upon a proffered lettuce leaf.

Doctor Jaquet was enthusiastic on the subject of hibernation, pointing with pride to the achievements in this direction of snakes and many animals, which were known to live to great ages. He declared his conviction that in suspended animation could be found an excellent cure for many diseases, notably troubles of the digestive tract; that during the period of suspension Nature, freed from the necessity of performing her ordinary routine functions, would be given an opportunity of making her own cure. In a word, suspended animation was, according to Dr. Jaquet, the great and true panacea for most of the evils with which mortality was afflicted.

"You mean," questioned Mr. Kearns, after Dr. Jaquet had launched out into his favorite discussion as a sequel to the resurrection of the rabbit, "if a man has trouble with his liver, or a pain in his stom-

ach, instead of giving him a pill, or other dose, you would suspend him?"

"That which you say there has reason!" replied the Doctor in his peculiar phrascology.

But Mr. Kearns' manner indicated his skepticism and the Doctor seemed quite piqued.

"And how do you bring about this condition of suspended animation?" asked Mr. Kearns.

"I put them to sleep. I can make sleep any person — all the world!" declared the little Doctor with conviction.

Mr. Kearns smiled.

"Ah! You doubt it?" asked the Doctor.

"Could you put me to sleep, for instance?" inquired Mr. Kearns, parrying the question.

"With facility!" replied Dr. Jaquet.

A look of polite incredulity crept into Mr. Kearns' face.

"Will you that I shall try?" asked the Doctor eagerly.

Mr. Kearns remained silent, somewhat taken aback by the novelty of the situation.

"Ah, you hesitate! You have fear that I shall succeed. But have no fear. There is nothing which can do you hurt. On the contrary, only good!"

"Fear!" exclaimed Mr. Kearns with a start. "Do not, I beg you, form the idea that I am afraid to subject myself to your test. I must return to Dr. Belden's early, so I cannot avail myself of your offer to-day, but extend it again some time and, upon my word, I shall be much inclined to take you up."

"I can make you sleep for six hours, six days, six weeks!" declared the Doctor with enthusiasm.

"Let us call it six hours and I should consider that you have fully vindicated your assertion," replied Mr. Kearns with a smile.

"Very well. I will prove to you some day," declared Dr. Jaquet. "Now, listen! To-morrow I will call for you at one o'clock. We will take a great walk together. I will conduct you to a little piece of land which I own over there in the mountains. On this land is a cave, where I will show you some wonderful things."

"Very well; that sounds interesting," replied Mr. Kearns. "You will call for us to-morrow, then?"

"Yes, my friends; au revoir until to-morrow," said the Doctor genially, as he courteously bowed them to the door.

"What do you think of that?" asked Mr. Kearns of Professor Dean, as they walked down the road on their way back to Dr. Belden's.

"Of what?" asked the Professor.

"Of the assertions made by our interesting little French friend," replied Mr. Kearns.

"In what connection?"

"Oh, as to this suspended animation business and his ability to put people to sleep and so on."

"My work has been entirely confined to the practical branches of science," answered the Professor cautiously. "I have really never had any opportunity of investigating any matters of this nature. Many peculiar claims and theories have been advanced as to mesmerism, hypnotism, and auto-suggestion, but I am not really competent to advise you as to their merits."

"Answered with the caution of an expert on the witness stand!" cried Mr. Kearns with a laugh. "But tell me this! Do you believe that out of ten men picked haphazard, he could succeed in getting say two out of the ten into a condition of suspended animation, or hypnotic sleep, or whatever you like to call it? What puzzles me is his apparent ability

to do it with those animals. If it were not for that fact, I should not be inclined to give the matter much attention."

"I really could not express an opinion," declared the Professor.

"Then, answer me this, O Mountain of Caution!" cried Mr. Kearns. "Would you be willing to join with me in putting the Doctor to the test?"

The Professor remained thoughtfully silent for a moment.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Kearns maliciously, "shall I throw the taunt in your teeth, which the little Doctor threw into mine: that you are afraid?"

"I will answer you this way," replied the Professor calmly. "To-morrow you and I are going out together in company of the Doctor. Should you decide at any time to-morrow while we are together to enter upon an adventure of this character, you will not find me loth to join you. When people start out together in any enterprise, it is a maxim with me that they should stand shoulder to shoulder."

"Spoken like a brick!" declared Mr. Kearns with enthusiasm.

"No," answered the Professor dryly; "it is a conceded fact that bricks do not talk. You are really becoming more wonderful than the Doctor in your assertions!"

CHAPTER II

"SLEEP ON, MY FRIENDS, SLEEP ON."

At the time appointed on the following day — it was the tenth of June, 1900 — Dr. Jaquet called for them and they started on one of their customary walks. The Doctor acted as guide. His course lay inland, in a northwesterly direction, and the trio marched jauntily on, chatting gaily together, until some four miles had been covered. Then the Doctor changed his course and they struck across country through land which was somewhat rocky and broken and thickly covered with scrub bushes and trees of a stunted growth.

"Halloa!" exclaimed Mr. Kearns, "this is pretty rough walking. Remember, too, we have the return journey. What is the use of wearing ourselves out going over ground like this?"

"Follow me," urged Dr. Jaquet, who was leading and picking the way with care.

"Well, tell us at least where you are leading us," said Mr. Kearns. "It's wild enough here never to have been trodden upon by the foot of man."

Thus questioned, the Doctor explained that he was leading the way to a little tract of land which he owned in the midst of this wilderness of scrub growth, apparently abandoned entirely to the squirrels and the jack-rabbits. He told how he had one day explored this land and had, by the sheerest accident, discovered a natural cave possessing some wonderful peculiarities. He decided to buy the land upon

which it was located, and had acquired it for a mere song as it was practically valueless for any purpose whatsoever. He had kept the cave a secret for fear of its being visited by intruders. They, too, must promise him to keep the matter secret. Patience! The ground was rough, but they would soon be there.

"Rough!" exclaimed the Professor; "it's as rough as civilization."

"Oh, come," responded Kearns, "you're always criticising civilization."

"Do you think it's a success?" demanded the Professor.

"Do you dispute it?" challenged Kearns.

"Can it, after all, be said," answered Professor Dean, thoughtfully, "that mankind at large has really gained any practical good by that progressive evolution known as civilization? Suppose you were the chief of a great tribe existing under primitive conditions, and suppose that you, possessed of all the knowledge of modern life which you have to-day, were confronted with the proposition as to whether you would leave the tribe as it was, or would introduce all the conditions of our present advanced civilization, what would be your decision?"

"Without having given the matter much thought," replied Mr. Kearns, "my offhand answer would be, I suppose, that I should divest my primitives of breech-clouts and put them into top-hats and trousers, and supply them with churches, theatres, hospitals, hotels, a stock-exchange, a police headquarters, and all the other and usual adjuncts of civilization."

"And if I were the chief of such tribe, and you brought such proposition to me, I should hesitate long before accepting it," rejoined the Professor. "I should ponder carefully whether it was not my bounden duty to the tribe to decapitate you, lest you

should escape and give the world knowledge of the existence of me and my tribe and thus bring to us by force the civilization which you proffered. What would your civilization mean to the tribe? It would give us great cities and the million and one artificial adjuncts which form part and parcel of modern life. Would the men of the tribe be as happy, as healthy, or as really comfortable in the teeming tenements, or box-like flat houses of the cities which had sprung up, as they were under their tents upon the plains? For those tenements and flat houses they would have to pay rent, and to earn that rent they would be compelled in many instances to convert themselves and their families into industrial slaves. Who ever heard of so-called savages being evicted for non-payment of rent, or dying by the hundreds for want of food as a consequence of economic conditions? And yet, let a great city spring up and you have thousands of such cases every year! You have spoken of the churches which your civilization would erect, but for every church which your great city of modern civilization would bring into existence, it would also create ten, nay one hundred, drinking-shops and gambling-houses and brothels. And as to morality, is a primitive community without churches ever as immoral as a civilized community with a church to every other block? You have spoken, too, of hospitals. It is true, your civilization would bring fine hospitals, with an army of doctors and vast stores of drugs, but with these your civilization, with its artificial forms of life, would bring into existence a thousand and one diseases utterly unknown to men living in a primitive state. Your cures might be very comprehensive and marvelous, but surely it would be infinitely better to escape the diseases themselves, in the first place. With pardonable professional pride, you have also

alluded to the existence of a police headquarters, but under primitive conditions such a place would be needless, for the causes which bring about the majority of crimes in a civilized community would not exist. In a word, the primitive tribesmen to whom I have referred would be safe as to their liberty, their homes, their health and their morality, whereas under civilization, and in return for the artificial and really superfluous adjuncts it has to offer, these primitive people must become industrial slaves and rent-sweaters and must surround themselves with all the evils arising from corruption, crime, immorality and disease. Who, I ask you, is the happier? The tribesman procuring his means of livelihood at will by fishing in rivers or in streams, or scouring the woods and the plains in search of game, or the freeman in name, but industrial slave in verity, who under the beneficent sway of our modern civilization ekes out a miserable subsistence in some sweatshop of the city at a dollar and a half a day."

"I must admit your tribesman would seem to have the best of it," declared Mr. Kearns.

"And look, too, at the social relations," continued the Professor. "In primitive life, the savage maiden mates according to her fancy, according to the promptings of her heart. In modern civilization, if we are to judge from what we so often read and hear, a great number of marriages turn upon the question of position, or of money, rather than of true affection. Winsome May, stung by her necessities or her ambition, offers herself up to chill December, or, her dainty flesh quivering with repulsion, surrenders herself into the arms of hoary Midas, and the children of such union are the offspring of Gluttony mated with Disgust. You see, these are questions which affect the very life blood of the nation! In this and

a hundred other ways, the tide of social life is interfered with and changed by the ever present influence of that one controlling factor in civilized life — money, money, money! Upon my word, it would seem as if the primitive tribesman had much better, in the interests of his true happiness and well-being, remain as he is!"

"What you say as far as crime is concerned," replied Mr. Kearns, "is undoubtedly true enough. If you except those offenses perpetrated under the influence of sudden passion, the great majority of crimes arise from the necessities and temptations which form part of modern social life. A good deal has been from time to time written about persons with criminal tendencies. There are undoubtedly such cases, but my experience is that a career of crime involves more hazard, harder work and less pay than almost any other form of occupation a man could go in for. The average criminal would be perfectly willing to undertake any amount of honest work to accomplish his ends, if it were within his power to accomplish them by such means, and he only perpetrates his crime because he sees no other way out of the situation. In saying this I am not justifying his methods, or warranting the soundness of general deductions, but am merely stating a fact. Crime is, as a rule, the result of environment, and this environment grows out of the conditions of modern social life."

"Then you admit the correctness of the facts upon which my theory is based!" exclaimed the Professor.

"To a certain extent, yes," replied Mr. Kearns; "but what would you? Would you advocate the renouncement of civilization forthwith and a return to the primitive status?"

"In the existing state of affairs," answered the

Professor gravely, "we are confronting a condition, not a theory. Of course, it would be utterly impracticable to advocate such a course; but I do say that we ought to be more modest in our vaunts as to these benefits conferred by our boasted modern civilization and that we ought to strive to make that civilization give a larger share of well-being and happiness to the great masses of men. As it is, civilization means the accruing of immense advantages to the few with corresponding very doubtful benefits to the many. This is all wrong and will not be permitted to continue forever."

Thus chatting on, they forced their way over ground which grew rougher and rougher and through brushwood and undergrowth which seemed to become more and more dense. Twice Mr. Kearns had severely stubbed his toe against rocks and the Professor's nose had been lacerated by some particularly vicious brambles. Both were becoming somewhat tired and were wondering what manner of chase they were being led, when the Doctor suddenly exclaimed:

"*Voila!* Here we are!"

His body bent almost to earth, Dr. Jaquet squeezed his way between two matted masses of undergrowth and, his companions following, they found themselves in a clearing, entirely surrounded by heavy bushes and covered by a rocky formation of very peculiar outline. From one side of the rock the Doctor removed a quantity of heaped-up brush and disclosed quite a large opening.

"My cave!" declared Dr. Jaquet proudly. "Await me while I make light!"

As he spoke, the Doctor struck a match and descended into the cave. A moment later he reappeared.

" I have lighted the lamp," he said. " You may enter."

His companions now perceived some roughly made steps which led down from the opening. These they carefully descended and found themselves in a goodly-sized cave of irregular formation — a cave which was partly the work of nature, but which had evidently been enlarged and partly transformed by human hands. On the floor were a number of heavy rugs and ranged along the walls were various furnishings. In the centre, suspended from the roof, was a handsome Venetian lamp, which now served to illuminate the surroundings.

" Welcome! " exclaimed the Doctor in a loud whisper.

Welcome!

Welcome!

Welcome!

Instantly following the Doctor's whisper, his utterance was repeated three distinct times in different parts of the cave. The effect was startling and weird.

" This I call ' The Cave of Whispers,' " said Dr. Jaquet, in response to his companions' inquiring looks. " See! You whisper and your words they come back to you! "

The Doctor then went on to explain that one of his objects in buying the land and fitting up the cave was to make a study of acoustics: a science comparatively undeveloped to this day. But the place had a peculiar charm for him apart from this, he declared.

The Professor and Mr. Kearns amused themselves for some time whispering various sentences, all of which were faithfully echoed back to them.

" And now," said Dr. Jaquet, " you must be tired, my friends. You shall yourselves rest and I shall

give you tobacco to smoke which you will find fit for a Sultan."

As he spoke, he arranged for them some rugs and cushions and produced a handsome Turkish Narghille, which he placed before them on the floor. This he proceeded to prime with a long-fibred, very pale colored tobacco, and to each of them he handed an amber stem.

"Smoke, my friends, and enjoy you yourselves," he said, as he applied a light to the tobacco. "Ah, it is, perhaps, a little chilly here. I will cover you and you shall have the music, too."

He stretched a rug over each of them, and then, from the side of the cave, brought forth a little music box, which he placed beside him and set in operation.

Dr. Jaquet took up a position facing them and lighted a Turkish cigarette.

"You are quite comfortable, my friends?" he asked.

"Quite!" answered the Professor.

"Delightful!" came the reply from Mr. Kearns.

And the cave echoed back their words.

The tobacco was peculiarly soothing and delicious. It really was, as the Doctor had declared, worthy of a Sultan. Both the Doctor's companions were somewhat tired after their walk. A peculiar sense of restfulness and comfort was upon them as they lay at ease, smoking the very excellent tobacco and listening to the sweet music falling so gently upon their ears. Thus silently they lay and smoked on. The Doctor's usual volubility was checked and he quietly smoked his cigarette, his black eyes fixed upon them.

The music box reached the end of its melody. Instantly the Doctor started it again.

"Look!" he said, in a low whisper, bending toward them. "Look at the lamp! See how it throws out to you all the light, all the fire of the diamond."

Slowly and mechanically, in obedience to his direction, they turned their eyes toward the gorgeous hanging lamp. It was as the Doctor said. From its glittering, multi-colored glass sides the light seemed to refract in a thousand variegated shades. The smoke issued from between the smokers' lips in slow and dreamy puffs; the rose-water bubbled rhythmically in the pipe; the sweet music played on.

. . . . . .

The odor of a strange incense seemed to fill the air. The lamp, grown to giant dimensions, appeared to send forth shafts of ever-changing light. The walls of the cave rolled back, disclosing magnificent cathedral aisles, boundless in expanse and rich in marble and porphyry and gilt, through which the majestic tones of an organ swelled. A sense of religious fervor and of overmastering awe filled their souls.

The scene changed. They were amid the gorgeous splendors of an Oriental palace — a palace which in its vastness was lost to all sense of proportion and whose massive dome reached high to heaven.

Hark! The strains of barbaric music, the clashing of cymbals. A multitude of dancing girls spring, fairy-like, into motion and move and sway in all the graceful, voluptuous motions of the Oriental dance. Their gazelle-like eyes sparkle; the ornaments upon their bosoms flash — surely this is the inner Paradise of Mohammed!

Again the scene changes. The great dome of the Eastern palace parts in twain and they are slowly and deliciously wafted upward. They have no sense

of the strangeness of their situation — no fear. Upward, ever upward, they pass to giddy heights and yet this same sense of all-pervading contentment and happiness. The air about them is laden with the perfumes of Araby, and strains of melody of more than earthly sweetness greet the enraptured senses. This must be the music of the spheres — the chant of the heavenly choir! And through this perfumed, music-laden air they are drifting — drifting — drifting ——

. . . . . .

The amber mouthpieces had dropped from the smokers' lips; their heads had sunk back upon the cushions; their lids were closed.

Gently, cautiously, the Doctor rose, his black eyes dilated with excitement. Over the sleepers he bent, making mysterious passes toward them as they lay. For an hour or more he thus worked; then with a sigh of exhaustion, the perspiration starting from his brow, he stepped back and contemplated them.

"Sleep on, my friends," he exclaimed, with a chuckle of satisfaction; "sleep on. Thus could I let you sleep for weeks — many weeks — but, I take it, the twenty-four hours will be enough to convince you that the Doctor Jaquet can make all the world to sleep."

He replaced the Turkish pipe and the music box in their respective places and put the other articles in the cave in order. Then he procured more rugs and arranging them over the sleepers, tucked them in carefully.

"Au revoir, my friends, until we meet again," he murmured and, with a sweeping bow to the sleeping forms, he made his exit.

Once outside, he carefully replaced the quantity of brush which effectually concealed the entrance to the cave. As he did so, there was a heavy, rumbling noise in the distance, and he glanced at the sky.

" I must get me home at high speed ! " he muttered to himself as he noted the darkening heavens. " There is a storm which is coming."

He accordingly retraced his steps at his best speed. He had proceeded but little more than half the distance, however, when the storm broke in all its fury: vivid flashes of forked lightning alternating with terrific clashes of thunder. Still he pressed on, not knowing how long the storm might last and bent upon reaching home.

At last, however, this Summer storm reached such a pitch of violence that he found himself compelled to seek shelter until its full fury had in some degree been spent. Not a habitation in sight! Some distance down the road, however, was a great oak, whose wide-spreading branches would afford at least a temporary haven. Hastening his steps, he reached the tree.

At that very instant, the whole heavens were illumined with a tremendous blaze of light. A great zigzag tongue of forked lightning shot forth and darted down upon the oak, rending its massive trunk asunder in one awful stroke.

And at the foot of the shattered tree, as the thunder crashed forth, lay a blackened and blighted shape, horrible to behold — the body of Dr. Raoul Jaquet.

BOOK II

THE PALACE OF THE KING

CHAPTER I

ON THE BROAD HIGHWAY

A-a-a-h!

A prolonged sigh swelled from Dean's lips.

"Thunder and Mars!" Kearns raised himself languidly on his elbow.

It seemed to them both that they had been sleeping for quite a long time — an unusually long time.

Where was the Doctor?

The sunlight was streaming down upon their faces. They were no longer in the cave, but were lying in the outer air upon the grass, their rugs still wrapped about them. A few steps away were two men, apparently laborers, who stood contemplating them with looks of wonderment not unmingled with alarm.

Slowly and unsteadily, Kearns rose to his feet. Dean followed his example. Both seemed weak and dizzy.

Kearns turned a pair of blinking eyes toward the laborers.

"How did we get here?" he asked with the husky voice of a man with a bad cold.

One of the laborers pointed toward the cave.

About the entrance some felled trees and piled underbrush showed where the men had been working.

"Where — where is the Doctor?" stammered Kearns, his eyes still blinking in the strong sunlight and his thoughts and words coming with some effort.

The two laborers turned to each other. On the face of each was a bucolic leer. They eyed each other for an instant and then the taller of the two slowly raised his forefinger, tapped his forehead, and winked knowingly to his companion. He was a tall, loose-jointed fellow, with a little black mark on the left side of his nose and there was something impudent and aggressive in him as he stood there grinning and showing his yellow fangs. His companion was short and stocky, with a freckled face, sandy hair, and a manner suggestive of bashful awkwardness. He turned to the two strangers furtively, as if half fearful that the other's actions might give offense.

"The Doctor," repeated the taller man slowly and with peculiar intonation; "the Doctor! I guess the chances be he's not far off and in a hot chase after both of yees!"

And he chuckled softly to himself, glancing at his companion.

"Not far off! Have you seen him? Which way did he go?" quickly inquired Dean.

"Seen him?" repeated the rustic; "no! I ain't seen him, nor any of his men."

"Then what made you say he was not far off?" demanded Dean.

Silence from the two rustics, who continued to exchange glances.

"Look here, my good men!" exclaimed Kearns impatiently; "wake up and listen to me. Just show us the way to the road and you shall be suitably re-

warded. Perhaps, too, you would find us a horse and carriage which we could hire to take us home."

The two men stared at the speaker, open-mouthed, amazed. Again they turned to each other.

"A horse and kerridge!" they exclaimed in a breath.

Then they broke into a loud laugh. Now it was the turn of Kearns and the Professor to exchange glances of astonishment. That a simple request to be supplied with information as to where a horse and carriage could be hired should produce such results was certainly amazing.

Kearns stepped nearer to Dean. "I believe these fellows are crazy," he whispered. "Perhaps they have escaped from the Weldon Asylum."

"The smaller man seems a case of senile dementia," whispered back the Professor, cautiously; "but the larger fellow looks to me like a dangerous lunatic — possibly a homicidal maniac. We may be in danger of our lives!"

While this colloquy was in progress, the rustics had not taken their eyes off the strangers for an instant. The taller of the two again spoke up.

"A horse and kerridge," he said. "Maybe if ye had a pitchfork apiece ye could scoot away through the air, leaving only a streak of brimstone behind ye. I've heerd tell o' sech things!"

Kearns' quick temper flashed up. He advanced upon the speaker.

"Confound you, you impudent ——"

"Run fer it, Jem; run fer it!" yelled the smaller man apprehensively. "They're a-goin' to spell!" He took to his heels at full speed.

Jem gave one quick glance at Kearns and was off after his companion.

Kearns and the Professor stood watching their rap-

idly retreating figures until they disappeared around the bend of a hill.

"Well — I'm hanged!" exclaimed Kearns. "Mad," he added with conviction, "mad as March hares."

"You see what comes of ill-advised asperity!" remarked Dean reprovingly. "Instead of soothing these two unfortunate madmen, you have thrown them into a condition of excitement. Your impetuosity has reacted upon them. You have sent them flying — running amuck — and God knows what may happen to any unfortunate who crosses their path!"

"But did you ever know of such impudence?" cried Kearns, still angry. "I civilly ask these louts the direction of the main road and where I can hire a horse and carriage; they laugh in my face; invite me to ride on a pitchfork! Things have come to a pretty pass if every lunatic one meets thinks he has full license to be as impudent as he pleases. And they acted as if they thought we were crazy, confound them!"

"It's a common delusion of crazy folks to imagine everyone is crazy except themselves," said the Professor.

"Yes; that's very true! I've noticed that!" assented Kearns.

"As I remarked before, a case of senile dementia, that little fellow," said the Professor sagaciously; "a clear case of senile dementia, my good friend!"

"Yes," declared Kearns, "I noted his sickly smile."

"Well," said Dean, "they're gone and we are fortunately left alive to tell the story and to put the madhouse people on their trail. The next thing to be done is to find the main road and get to the nearest village. There we can hire a conveyance

and get refreshments. I am both hungry and thirsty."

"The nearest village," repeated Kearns musingly; "I take it that would be Averill, or would Patchley be nearer?"

"I should say Averill, decidedly."

"Well; let's be off, then, and find the main road," suggested Kearns. "This must be the way, I'm pretty sure." Picking up the blankets and rugs in which they had been wrapped, he tossed them through the entrance to the cave and started off.

"Is it safe, do you think, for us to leave those things there?" asked the Professor.

"What else can we do with them?" answered Kearns. "Let the Doctor attend to that. We'll notify him, of course, as soon as we get back. He had no business to leave us in that fashion, anyway!"

"I quite agree with you as to that," assented the Professor. "Tired out with our walk, we must have fallen asleep as we smoked and he calmly left us."

"By George!" exclaimed Kearns, with a sudden start; "I wonder if the Doctor has been up to any of his pranks."

"Pranks!" repeated the Professor in astonishment.

"Yes; putting people to sleep. I wonder if this sleep of ours was of his contriving."

The Professor contracted his brows thoughtfully.

"Now that you mention it," he declared, "I should not be astonished if it was."

"Did you notice that pale-colored, peculiar, but certainly very excellent tobacco?" continued Kearns eagerly. "Upon my word, I begin to suspect it was fixed — doped — drugged!"

"You don't mean to say so!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Well, I just did say so," retorted Kearns.

"If such is indeed the case, how long do you think we have slept?" questioned the Professor.

Kearns drew out his watch, looked at it and then put it to his ear.

"What does your watch say?" he asked.

The Professor consulted his watch.

"It has stopped," he declared. "Why, it seems to be run down."

Kearns glanced at the sky.

"Professor," he remarked solemnly, "it looks to me as if we had slept clean into the next day."

"How so?" asked the Professor, vacantly.

"Both our watches are run down," replied Kearns. "That's one point. When we entered the cave it was half past three o'clock in the afternoon. From the sun I'd say it's now about one o'clock. As time hasn't the habit of going backward, I'd reach the conclusion that this must be the afternoon of the following day."

"Really, this is most astonishing!" exclaimed the Professor, apparently quite shocked at the idea that he should have thus slumbered for nearly twenty-four hours.

They worked their way around the base of a hill, over ground rough and stony and partially covered with trees and undergrowth. Before long they emerged upon comparatively open ground and then a puzzling feature presented itself to their attention. When led to the cave by the Doctor, he had taken them miles through scrub growth and over rough land. Now, after traveling a comparatively short distance they had emerged into the open and before them stretched fields under cultivation, while some three-quarters of a mile away lay a broad, white road. This was decidedly a much shorter cut than the path

the Doctor had taken. But how was it that he had not known of it? It was really puzzling!

"There's the road!" exclaimed Dean, pointing to the broad, white line in the distance.

"Yes," assented Kearns, musingly, "but is that the road we are looking for? This doesn't seem to be the way we came. The lay of the land is different."

"Perhaps we have come out of the brush in a different direction," suggested Dean.

"We certainly must have," replied Kearns. "Well, right or wrong, there's nothing to do but to make for that road before us."

The wisdom of this view was apparent, and they accordingly made their way around the fields under cultivation and finally — hot and tired — gained the road. Up and down it they looked and perceived in the distance, some two miles away to the left, the outlines of what appeared to be a goodly-sized town.

"I wonder what the name of that place may be," remarked Kearns.

"Whatever it is, it's a good way off," replied Dean, mopping the perspiration from his brow. "But have you noticed what a magnificent road this is? It reminds me of one of those splendid *chemins* of Southern France, only this is even finer."

Both stood admiringly contemplating the road. It was very wide, very white and splendidly smooth. On one side was a broad, raised pathway, evidently for the use of foot-passengers. A curious feature of the roadway itself was its division by a raised earthwork barrier, cutting it into two even parallel halves. At regular intervals were steps by which ascent might be made from the road to the footway and also little bridges connecting the dividing barrier with the pathway.

"Quite a model road," commented Kearns. "I suppose it's some kind of a speedway. It's queer, though, that I never heard there was such a road in this section. Fact is, I don't remember ever seeing a road of this kind anywhere."

"Nor I," declared Dean.

They were standing on the extreme edge of the road, just where they had stepped out from the field. A short distance away was a bend, concealing the run of the road for some little distance beyond.

Suddenly there were two sharp toots, as of a horn, a rattle and a rush of wheels, and past them dashed a peculiar, arrow-shaped, horseless vehicle, traveling at tremendous speed. So rapid was its flight that they had time to catch only a fleeting glimpse of a man, whose right hand gripped a long, shining lever. So sudden was the appearance of the vehicle and so great its speed that the two wayfarers were both startled and astonished.

"Was that an automobile?" exclaimed Dean.

"It looked like one," answered Kearns, "but I never before saw one of that peculiar construction. And the speed! Whew!"

"Yes; reckless to the last degree," remarked Dean. "I think it would be highly desirable for us to gain the footpath before we meet another traveler."

"Stated with the accuracy of science," declared Kearns. "By all means, let's take the footpath."

They accordingly traversed the first roadway, clambered over the dividing barrier, crossed the second roadway and ascended to the footpath. Then they turned their faces in the direction of the town visible in the distance. They had proceeded but a few steps when Kearns suddenly stopped and turned to the Professor with the air of a man to whom a happy thought has come.

"Professor," he said with a smile, "it's just occurred to me that right here, in my hind pocket, I've a flask. I remember slipping it in before starting, thinking it might come in handy during our walk, and it looks now as if it might."

"A flask!" exclaimed the Professor, diffidently. "May I ask what it contains?"

"Whiskey — just plain whiskey," replied Kearns, as he pulled out the flask. "It's a warm day and we're both tired, in spite of that long rest. May I invite you to join me?"

"The day *is* warm," assented the Professor, "and we *are* tired. I do not usually indulge, but upon this occasion ——"

"Help yourself," exclaimed Kearns, detaching the small silver receptacle which served as a drinking cup and handing it and the flask to Dean.

The latter helped himself and handed back the flask to Kearns. "Really!" he exclaimed with some show of alarm, "that seems to be powerful stuff. I can feel it all through me."

"It's the finest old Kentucky whiskey," replied Kearns, somewhat nettled that the quality of his liquor should be questioned. "It was a special present to me from Colonel Claybourne, the famous distiller."

"Powerful — very powerful!" repeated Dean.

Kearns poured himself out a liberal measure.

"Ah! Splendid stuff!" he exclaimed as he lowered the drinking cup from his lips. "That puts new life into one. But, by George, you're right! It is strong. I never before found it so strong as this."

"It must be because we are drinking it upon empty stomachs," suggested the Professor.

"Even so," declared Kearns, "I can't understand why it should seem to have such strength."

They proceeded on their way and had gone but a short distance when they came to a huge sign-board, planted high up upon the barrier dividing the two roadways. This sign-board bore a number of lines, in great black letters. The two wayfarers stopped and eagerly scanned the inscription. It read: —

REGULATIONS OF THE HIGHWAY.

Phaeromobiles, Lakomoters and other Voiters MUST NOT EXCEED THE SPEED ALLOWED BY LAW.

At all CURVES, directors of voiters must slow down to HALF SPEED.

DESCENTS must be made from the LEFT side only of voiters south-bound and from the RIGHT side only of voiters north-bound, and after descending, persons must traverse the roadway by the CROSS-BRIDGES ONLY.

All voiters must hoist the STOP SIGNAL before coming to a HALT.

All voiters must bear lights of STANDARD SIZE and STRENGTH after SUNSET and must, in addition, carry in RESERVE a RED DANGER LAMP, with independent storage, which must be IMMEDIATELY EXPOSED OVER THE VOITER in case of ACCIDENT to the regulation lights.

The casting of any OBSTRUCTION on the roadway is a FELONY.

Any violation of these Regulations will be PROSECUTED to the FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW.

WARING,
I. & R. Commissioner of Highways.

They read the sign over and both stood staring at it, a puzzled expression on their faces.

"Very curious!" commented Dean. "The language used seems to me quite strange. Take that

word *voiter,* for instance. What does it mean? Did you ever see the word before?"

"Never!" declared Kearns, still staring at the sign-board.

"It is, I take it," continued Dean, "a new-fangled word coined by the makers of automobiles to designate some new kind of motor conveyance. Possibly it is taken from the French word *voiture,* which means carriage."

"What's puzzling me," said Kearns, "is the title of this fellow Waring, who signs that notice. Read it: 'I. & R. Commissioner of Highways.' It's high-sounding enough, but what the deuce does the 'I. & R.' stand for?"

"'I. & R.,'" repeated the Professor, staring hard at the sign. "I find it impossible to imagine what those letters stand for. If we were in Europe, I should instantly surmise the meaning, but we are in the United States."

"Yes; we're in the United States," replied Kearns, "and here we see those letters only around election time — '*I*' for Independent and '*R*' for Republican. But that wouldn't explain matters here; for what's the meaning of the '*and*' between the two letters? Well, I don't suppose we'll find out by standing here in the sun staring at that big board. Besides, I don't care a rap whether this Waring is a Republican or a confounded Independent. Let's have another little nip from the flask to recruit our strength and move on."

"I seldom indulge," began the Professor, "but ——"

"Don't be bashful, Professor," hastily interposed Kearns; "help yourself."

After each had thus refreshed himself, they renewed their journey.

"From your scornful reference to Independents just now," remarked Dean, "you don't seem to hold them in very high estimation."

"Ah, those Independents!" exclaimed Kearns, with fine scorn. "It's my experience that an Independent is usually a fellow with a keen eye to *his* independent interest. His independence consists of balancing his vote between the two parties, with a view to casting it for the side offering him the higher inducement. A pest on your Independents, I say! But, hello! what's the matter with your hat?"

The sun was streaming fiercely down and the Professor, to shield his face, gave the brim of his white Fedora a sharp pull over his eyes. But the brim parted from the crown and settled comically around his nose. An examination of the hat showed the goods to be in a condition which Kearns described as "absolutely rotten" — almost brittle as tinder.

"A nice hat that!" commented Kearns. "Permit me to ask you the classic question: Where did you get that hat?"

"At Knox," ruefully answered the Professor. "But," he added, critically surveying his companion, "it doesn't seem to me that you have much to boast about as a Beau Brummell."

It was Kearns' turn to examine his clothes. Glancing down at the blue serge suit he wore, he saw that a large section of cloth had apparently rotted away from the bottom of one of the trouser legs, and the lining of the coat had broken away from the material in several places. Like the Professor's hat, the whole material seemed tinder-like and brittle. To add to his discomfiture, the leather of his left shoe began to part company with the sole. Ruefully, Kearns noted this involuntary disrobement. He had always been somewhat particular in dress.

"Professor," he exclaimed humorously, "if we want to keep our reputation for decency it's high time we reached home."

"Very high time," assented Dean solemnly.

"If we could only get a hack, or a conveyance of any kind," lamented Kearns.

"I would be willing to ride home in the bottom of an express wagon," declared the Professor. "Even a coal cart I would not despise."

"But there's not a vehicle in sight!" deplored Kearns.

"Not even an ash-cart, or a hearse," declared the Professor.

"There's just one more nip left in the flask," said Kearns, sadly; "let's take that and move on."

"I rarely indulge," began the Professor, "but ——"

"Yes, I know!" interrupted Kearns hastily; "you've mentioned that before. Kindly help yourself."

"But," said the Professor, sternly, "I was going to add that I felt it my duty to do so upon this occasion out of regard for you."

"Regard for me!" exclaimed Kearns in perplexity.

"Yes," continued the Professor. "For some time past I have noticed, sir, that the tip of your nose is becoming unduly red, and that your eyes have the congested appearance which betokens incipient intoxication. I do not know, sir, whether in due regard for you — who, from the position you hold, are presumed to pose as a conservator of public morals — it is not my duty to forthwith dispose of that little which yet remains in this pernicious flask."

"Professor," declared Kearns, mockingly, "out of consideration for you, I have hesitated to speak

earlier, but it now is incumbent upon me to say that I have had my eye on you for more than ten minutes past. You, as an instructor of the community and a trainer of budding youth, should stand forth as a firm and shining example of all that is straightforward and goodly, and yet it is my duty to inform you that your present way is not straightforward nor is your walk upright. In a word, you are staggering, Professor."

"Sir!" exclaimed the Professor with dignity.

"A fact, sir!" declared Kearns. "I will draw a mark upon this path and I'll wager two to one you can't walk it in a straight line."

"I can't accept your test," said the Professor cautiously. "I'm somewhat fatigued to-day and I admit a certain peculiar weakness in the knees."

"H'm!" exclaimed Kearns.

"Shall we divide?" asked the Professor softly, holding the flask in his hand.

"Agreed!" whispered back Kearns.

Once more they started, speculating as they went over what strange necromancy the Doctor could have exerted to work such curious effects alike upon their surroundings and their persons. When about a mile from the village they saw approaching two women, carrying between them a basket.

"Good-day, Ma'am," said Kearns with much politeness, as they met; "it's a warm day."

"Yes, sir," answered the elder woman, "it is a warm day, but seasonable for this time of year."

"Why," said Kearns, "you don't usually have it as warm as this out here so early in the year, do you?"

"Early in the year!" exclaimed the woman. "Sure it's not too warm for the end of July."

The end of July!

Kearns and the Professor turned to each other in bewilderment. It was the tenth day of June when they had started on the walk with Dr. Jaquet, and here was this woman telling them it was the end of July. Oh, monstrous, incredible! They had slept a full six weeks!

"Then, too, sir," continued the woman, who seemed not disinclined to rest her heavy basket and indulge in a little gossip, "it's always apt to be warm on a hot day around fourteen o'clock."

"Around fourteen o'clock!" repeated Kearns and the Professor, both agape.

"Yes; but I consider fifteen o'clock to be the hottest hour of the day."

"Fifteen o'clock!" echoed the men.

"Tell me," said Kearns, after a pause, "what's the name of that village?"

"Pemberton, sir."

"Pemberton — Pemberton," repeated Kearns. "I thought I knew all the places in this section, yet I never heard of Pemberton. Can you tell me in which direction lies Averill?"

"Averill, sir? I never heard the name."

"Have you lived here long?"

"All my life."

Kearns paused a moment thoughtfully. Then a sudden thought occurred to him.

"You say this is the end of July?"

"Yes sir; the twenty-fifth."

"Any news lately about the nominations?"

"Nominations, sir!" repeated the woman; "what nominations?"

"Why, the Presidential, of course!"

"The Presidential," repeated the woman blankly.

"Yes," said Kearns, gently; "the Presidential nominations."

The woman made no reply; she stood staring blankly at the speaker.

The younger woman all this time had been eyeing the wayfarers with curiosity. Into her brown eyes there now came a look of suspicion and mistrust.

"Mother," she whispered, plucking the elder woman by the sleeve, "we'd better be going." And she caught up one end of the basket.

The situation was certainly embarrassing. Kearns made a hasty endeavor to turn the subject.

"The village seems a good way off and we are tired," he said. "Do you think, if we wait here, we might get a horse and carriage to take us to the village?"

The woman glanced sharply at him and gathered up her end of the basket. She and her daughter started on their way. As she passed Kearns, she turned her head.

"It's ill work," she said, "a-poking fun at those who've given you naught but civil answers."

Kearns and Dean stood watching the retreating figures as they passed down the road. Suddenly, as by one impulse, they faced each other. The Professor laid his hand upon Kearns' shoulder.

"The twenty-fifth of July — did you hear that woman say ——"

"Yes; I heard," answered Kearns, slowly.

"If her statement be true, we have been dead to the world for a good six weeks."

Both men stood silent for a moment. Then the Professor again spoke:

"These strange surroundings — the queer actions of these people! What can it all mean?"

"Mean!" answered Kearns with a laugh. "It begins to look as if we were either mad, or bewitched!"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH THE COCKED HAT.

For a long minute they stood there, facing each other, undecided and perplexed, bewildered by the strangeness of the situation. Kearns spoke first.

"The end of our trouble lies there," he exclaimed, pointing to the village. "I'm hungry, thirsty and tired. Come!"

"I agree with you," answered the Professor. "Let us push on, by all means."

In spite of heat and fatigue another half hour found them on the outskirts of the village. As they approached they were passed several times by vehicles leaving the village and proceeding along the road at a high rate of speed. The occupants of most of these vehicles scanned the wayfarers with eager curiosity.

Reaching the village, the first thing to attract their attention was the peculiar construction of its streets. The sidewalks on either side of what appeared to be the principal street were moving sidewalks and the roadway, where the vehicles passed up and down, was depressed to a depth some twenty feet below the level of the sidewalks. At all the street crossings were bridges connecting the sidewalks on either side of the way.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Kearns. "I had no idea there was such a town as this in these parts, or anywhere else, for that matter!"

"It certainly seems to be a model place," declared

the Professor. "Just look, what a splendid system of separating the vehicles from pedestrians."

"If such a system could be adopted in the city, it would annually save many lives now lost in street accidents," remarked Kearns.

The second house before them was a comfortable inn, with a low, wide porch, holding a number of tables where sat men drinking.

"I am really very thirsty," said the Professor. "Let us refresh ourselves here before going further. Shall we take a table on the porch?"

"No," suggested Kearns, "let's go inside. We'll probably get quicker service."

They ascended the two steps, crossed the porch and entered what appeared to be the bar-room. It was spacious, with tables and chairs on either side of the entrance and with a long bar facing the door. Behind the bar stood a white-jacketed bartender.

"What will you have?" inquired Kearns, as they reached the bar.

"A long drink of Rhine wine and seltzer," answered the Professor.

Kearns turned to the bartender.

"A long drink of Rhine wine and seltzer and a high ball."

"A long drink of Rhine wine and seltzer and a ——?"

"High ball."

"High ball? Never heard of it," the bartender said thoughtfully.

"What!" exclaimed Kearns. "Never heard of a high ball? It's the most popular drink in the country."

"That's likely, isn't it?" answered the bartender, with some scorn. "I've worked in a good many places in New York and I never heard of it."

"Never heard of it!" cried Kearns. "Why, man, the head barkeeper of the Waldorf-Astoria told me a couple of weeks — that is — ah — a couple of months ago — that they sold over two hundred high balls a day."

"The Waldorf-Astoria," repeated the bartender, shortly; "what's that?"

Kearns could only gasp in astonishment.

"The Waldorf-Astoria," repeated the bartender meditatively; "oh, yes! I think I remember now. Isn't that the big restorang and commercial lodging-house 'way down below Forty-second Street somewhere? Sure, I remember, now. I couldn't tell you what they may sell in a place like that. I've always worked in first-class places. How did you say that drink is made?"

"Simply a little whiskey and a long dash of seltzer," said Kearns, wearily.

"Oh!" answered the bartender airily; "that's a Marquanna — called after the famous Marquis Marquanna."

"Call it what you like," said Kearns testily, "but serve it up; I'm parched with thirst. Give me Hunter whiskey."

"What whiskey?"

"Hunter."

"Never heard of it!"

"Great Scott!" cried Kearns. "What have you, then?"

"What brands? Why, we have both."

"Both? How do you call them?"

"Imperial Court and Consolidated Trust."

"Never heard of either of them," retorted Kearns, maliciously. "However, give me either one; only hurry."

The bartender produced a long-necked bottle of

Rhine wine and a peculiar wicker-covered bottle of seltzer. The whiskey he measured out and poured into a tall glass. Then he added the seltzer.

Both the wayfarers emptied their glasses in one long, greedy draught.

"That really went down well!" remarked the Professor as he laid aside his glass.

"So well," replied Kearns, "that I think we might venture once again. What say you, Professor?"

"I rarely —" began the Professor.

"Fill them up again," ordered Kearns of the bartender.

At this moment there was a commotion at the other end of the bar-room which attracted general attention. Ranged against the wall were three strange looking machines, remotely suggestive of barber chairs. There was a man seated in each of two of the machines, which, with a gentle whirr of wheels, were in operation. They were automatic shaving machines, operated by depositing a coin in the slot.

The commotion which had been caused grew out of the fact that one of the machines had apparently become disordered, which resulted in the occupant of its chair receiving a slight gash upon one side of his chin. The person thus mutilated was furious. He sprang from the chair and, seizing his walking stick, began furiously belaboring the machine.

"The Chinese pest seize (whack! whack!) this confounded, infernal machine (whack! whack!) it's gone and cut me nearly clean through to the teeth (whack! whack! whack!) I'll ——"

"Hi! Hold on there!" yelled the man in the adjoining machine. "You're shaking this automat of mine, sir, so that it's trembling all over; just at the moment, too, when the knife's over my gullet."

"I don't care!" howled back the man with the stick. "I've been cut and I'll never stop until I've smashed this infernal thing into bits." And he banged away at the machine.

"Stop, I say!" yelled the other man, with bulging eyes, "I can feel the knife entering my skin. If I'm cut, I'm liable to get the erysipelas. By heaven, sir, if you make this automat cut me, I'll have your blood!"

The bartender, scenting a tragedy, ran from behind the bar and succeeded finally in pacifying the man with the stick.

"It isn't often those machines get out of order," said the bartender as he returned to his post, "but when they do, it's apt to make customers mad."

"They are automatic shaving machines, I see," remarked Kearns.

"Yes; and a mighty handy and ingenious invention they are," answered the bartender. "You drop a dime in the slot and you get a light or close shave, as you may desire, and your photograph thrown in at the end of the operation. Did you ever try them?"

"No."

"Then you ought to," urged the bartender.

"Never!" said Kearns with decision. "I find it bad enough to have my nose tweaked and my face bedaubed by a human, but never will I trust my life to any confounded machine of this character. By the way, you may serve up those drinks I ordered."

"Same?" inquired the bartender.

"Yes; that was pretty good whiskey," said Kearns. "What did you say was the brand?"

"Imperial Court."

"And the other brand you have?"

"Consolidated Trust."

"Well," exclaimed Kearns, "I must say I don't like your names. I am equally opposed to Imperialism and to Trusts. Between the two evils, I don't know which to choose. However, as I have tried the Imperial brand, this time I'll go in for the Trust."

The bartender gave the speaker a quick, sharp glance. Then he winked warningly and rolled his eyes in the direction of one of the tables at which two men were seated. These two men were intently watching Kearns and his companion, and as the former turned, following the direction of the bartender's glance, both men hastily looked away and assumed an air of listless indifference. One of the men was small, with a blond mustache, blue eyes and a squint. His companion was tall, thin and dark. In the meantime, the bartender was preparing the drinks ordered.

He served these and, their first thirst somewhat appeased, the travelers this time put down the glasses only half emptied. Kearns laid a fifty-cent piece on the counter in payment. The bartender picked it up and eyed it curiously. Then he laid it carefully away, not in the cash drawer, but among some small glasses on one of the shelves of the bar.

"Let us have some cigars," suggested the Professor.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Kearns, turning to the bartender; "cigars, if you please."

His voice was pitched somewhat higher than usual and his face was slightly flushed. It was as if the two drinks he had taken had gone a bit to his head. Curious that a six weeks' abstinence should make a man so susceptible!

"What kind of a town is this, anyway," said he to the barkeeper, in a tone of banter, "where you

don't keep any of the popular brands of whiskey and where I don't see a campaign banner, though the election is coming!"

"Election!" repeated the barkeeper blankly.

"Election is what I said," repeated Kearns with emphasis. "Which way does this town go — Democratic or Republican?"

The bartender stared first at the speaker and then turned an uneasy eye toward the two men at the table.

"We are loyal here — loyal!" he stammered at last.

"Loyal!" cried Kearns, flushing, "loyal to what? The existing administration, I suppose you mean?"

"Yes; to the — to the — existing administration," stammered the barkeeper confusedly.

At this point Dean interposed, with some show of warmth.

"Then," he cried, "I feel sorry for your intelligence, for there was never a bigger nest of corruptionists and oppressors of the people than the existing administration!"

As these words were uttered there was a murmur and a strange commotion in the place. The man with the squint left the table and quickly passed out. His companion rose and placed himself at the door, as if to check any attempt at exit. The bartender turned pale as one of his clouts behind the bar.

"Hush," he whispered, apprehensively; "hush! You will get yourselves into trouble and the house will lose its license."

"A pretty state of things," retorted the Professor, "when a free American citizen cannot speak his mind openly. I say it, and I don't care who hears me, that I am opposed to Corruption, Imperialism and Trusts!"

"GO!" cried the barkeeper, with the air of a man wrought by his fears to a pitch of rage. "Out you go, I say! You can't talk that way in here!"

"All right!" interposed Kearns, apparently much amused at the warmth displayed; "this gentleman has told you his views and we'll now take our cigars, and go."

"No! no!" cried the bartender, hastily removing the cigar boxes; "go now — quick!"

But at this instant there was a sound of feet at the entrance and the little man with the squint reappeared, accompanied by a gorgeous creature in uniform and cocked hat. The two stepped up to Kearns and the Professor, while the dark man still maintained his position at the door.

"Come!" said the man in uniform curtly.

"Why — what do you mean?" exclaimed Kearns.

"You are under arrest — both!" said the man with the squint.

"Arrest!" exclaimed the Professor excitedly.

"Arrest!" cried Kearns angrily. "Why, what the devil do you mean, sir? I am Thomas Kearns, of New York, and I'll make it precious hot for you if you attempt any pleasantries with me!"

The little man regarded the speaker with an evil and contemptuous leer.

"I don't care who you be," he said. "I arrest you both."

"For what?" interposed the Professor.

"Sedition," said the little man.

"Sedition!" cried Kearns, with a guffaw; "sedition, eh? And by what authority, pray?"

The squint in the man's eyes became more pronounced. He made a signal to his companion at the door. The man in uniform laid his hand upon the Professor's arm.

"By what authority?" again demanded Kearns.

The man threw back his coat and displayed a resplendent badge. Then came the answer to Kearns' question:

"IN THE NAME OF THE KING!"

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE REVELATION

"In the name of the King!" cried Kearns, half indignantly, half amused. "I'm sure I don't understand what you're driving at; but from that badge I take it you represent the Law, and the Law I am always willing to obey. I'll go with you; but I warn you, you'll suffer for this work!"

The two men made no reply to this threat, but placing themselves on either side of him they marched out of the place, followed by the man in uniform, with Dean in charge. As they passed along the street, several loiterers and a number of small boys followed in their wake. The prisoners seemed to arouse the greatest curiosity.

Their captors hurried them along at a rapid gait to a neat stone building, with two imposing green lamps outside. Up a short flight of stone steps the prisoners were hustled and into a spacious room, where behind a large desk sat a man in uniform. Before the desk the party lined up.

"Is this the Sergeant?" asked Kearns, surveying curiously the official uniform.

"Lieutenant," curtly answered the man behind the desk. "What's the charge?" he asked sharply, turning to the little man with the squint.

"Treasonable and seditious utterances in a public place, Lieutenant," answered the little man glibly. "Utterances in violation of the statute and against

the peace of His Majesty, the King, his crown and dignity."

"Did you take exact note of these utterances?" asked the official.

"I did, Lieutenant."

"Give them."

In obedience to the command, the man gave a fairly faithful repetition of the words uttered by the Professor in the bar-room.

He who was addressed as Lieutenant looked serious.

"Your name," he demanded of Kearns.

"Thomas Kearns," was the answer, impressively given; "and I'm chief of detectives of the New York police."

The Lieutenant glanced up quickly, with an astonished look.

"My name isn't unfamiliar, perhaps," continued Mr. Kearns with some sarcasm.

The Lieutenant laughed softly.

"Yes," he replied, "the name is familiar to me. So is that of Captain Kidd, and other legendary heroes of the past. Thomas Kearns, eh? There isn't a small boy in the country who doesn't know the name and who hasn't read of his exploits."

For a moment Kearns stood silent, as if he hardly gathered the sense of the words. Then his face flushed and he found voice.

"You talk about the past," he said, in incisive tones. "I don't understand you. I *am* the Chief of the Department I have named—right now—at this present moment; and that fact, I think, you'll not find disputed by any member of the Uniformed Force, be his rank what it may. If you have any doubt, I would suggest that you telephone to Official Headquarters in New York."

"Telephone!" ejaculated the Lieutenant. Again he laughed amusedly.

"I said telephone," retorted Kearns sharply. "Perhaps," he added scornfully, "you are not equipped with such an instrument here!"

"Scarcely," answered the Lieutenant with a sniff, casting his eye toward a handsome looking instrument at the further end of the room. "A telephone, eh? Yes, I remember some time ago seeing one displayed as a curiosity at the Eden Musee in New York. Quite an interesting antique!"

"Sir," said Kearns sternly; "I haven't time to bandy foolish words with you. My friend and I are tired and we wish to go home at once. I want to ask you what kind of a charge this is upon which your men have dared to arrest two reputable citizens."

"Unless the Medical Examiner declares them irresponsible," answered the Lieutenant sarcastically, "the two reputable citizens are likely to find this matter pretty serious before they get through with it."

"This is outrageous!" exclaimed Kearns, his anger rising. "Your behavior, sir, is infamous. If you occupied a similar position in the city to that which you do here, I would have you brought up on charges and reduced to the ranks for such conduct."

The Lieutenant paid no heed to this outbreak.

"Your residence?" he demanded in formal tones.

Before Kearns could reply, the door of the station house was thrown hurriedly open and a tall, portly man, with red face, iron gray hair and side whiskers, bustled in. The Lieutenant turned his eyes toward the newcomer and then raised his hand in military salute.

"Are these the prisoners?" asked the arrival, walking over to the desk.

"Yes, Colonel," answered the Lieutenant.

"They were found on my estate?"

"No, Colonel; they were arrested at Tomlinson's."

"I understand; but they were originally found on my lands."

"That I know nothing about, Colonel. I——"

"What do they say—what have you found out about them?" interrupted the Colonel eagerly.

"Nothing as yet. I was about to take the record when you came in."

"I will question them myself," said the Colonel. He turned to the prisoners. His manner betrayed a certain curiosity and eagerness, but his tone was kindly and gentle.

"How did you come to be where you were found?" he asked.

"The confounded Doctor!" blurted out Kearns impatiently.

"The Doctor, eh!" exclaimed the Colonel with interest. "What doctor? Tell me about him."

"Well," answered Kearns, hesitating, "the circumstances are somewhat peculiar and I don't know that either my friend or myself care to figure as the heroes of a sensational newspaper story."

"I beg you," said the Colonel with great earnestness, "to speak out at once. I believe it to be important—extremely important that you should do so."

Kearns still hesitated.

"Oh, tell the gentleman the state of the case, by all means," exclaimed the Professor. "I feel really quite tired and exhausted and am anxious to get as quickly as possible out of this dilemma."

"Tired—exhausted!" cried the Colonel. He turned to the Lieutenant. "Give them chairs. If what I suspect be true, it is of the highest importance that no mishap should occur to them!"

Chairs were procured for the two prisoners and,

when they were seated, Dean turned to his companion. "Speak out and end this situation," he again urged.

"All right," assented Kearns. Without further delay he narrated their experiences with the Doctor in the cave. The Colonel listened with extraordinary interest.

"And so," said Kearns in conclusion, "if this is really the month of July, as I've been told, we must have slept, or been in a condition of suspended animation, as that confounded Doctor called it, for a period of six weeks. But, tell me, what is the date?"

But the Colonel, who was looking at the prisoners with absorbed interest, did not answer. Instead, he put the following question, bending forward in eager anxiety for the reply:

"Can you tell me the date when you went into that cave and entered into that—ah—sleep you have described?"

"Certainly," answered Kearns. "It was June the tenth."

"June the tenth of what year?"

"June the tenth, nineteen hundred, of course."

"What!"

"Whew!"

Both the Colonel and the Lieutenant uttered exclamations. The Colonel was red and excited; the Lieutenant half rose from his seat behind the desk. The prisoners stared in astonishment. What could there be so very extraordinary in the simple statement they had made?

There was a dead pause for a moment. Then the Colonel again turned to the Lieutenant.

"This is certainly very strange—very wonderful," he said. "They must be taken in hand pending developments. Care must be taken of them—that they do not succumb ——"

"What is so strange—what is it that is so wonderful?" broke in the Professor.

But the Colonel disregarded the question.

"I will take them with me—to my place," he continued, addressing the Lieutenant. "They will be properly cared for there."

"But the charge! How about the charge which has been preferred against them?"

"As a county magistrate, I am empowered to admit them to bail."

"That's true, Colonel."

"Let the charge stand. For the time being, I permit them to go on their own recognizance. I will take care of them."

"Very well, Colonel. Will you please sign the necessary papers?"

"Yes; give them to me."

The Lieutenant handed the Colonel a paper and a pen and the latter hastily scratched a signature. Then he turned to Kearns and the Professor.

"Come with me," he said.

But Kearns demurred.

"Will you excuse me, Colonel," he said; "but both my friend and myself want to go without further delay to our own place. We've not the advantage of your acquaintance, and I'm sure I don't understand the meaning of these proceedings."

"You've been arrested on a serious charge," said the Colonel gravely, but with good humor, "and you're practically parolled in my custody. I don't see what you can very well do, except take advantage of my hospitality, or adopt the unpleasant alternative of a cell."

"But," began Kearns with indignation, "I must assure you that ——"

"I beg you not to excite yourselves," exclaimed the

Colonel, as one might seek to quiet a fractious child. "It might be very bad for you—even fatal, under the circumstances. No one can tell what might happen, I assure you! Be content to come with me."

"Let us go with the gentleman," urged the Professor.

"Oh, very well," answered Kearns. "I have no objection to seeing the adventure through to the end."

"Come, Bowman, come, Walker," said the Colonel, turning to the cross-eyed man and his companion; "assist them to my phaermobile."

"I don't think we need assistance, thank you," said the Professor, rising and waving away the tall dark man.

"Assistance, indeed!" exclaimed Kearns as he repulsed the cross-eyed man. "I should say not!"

"But you might fall! Pray be careful!" urged the Colonel with officious kindness.

"I may if I don't get something to eat pretty soon," laughed Kearns.

"Yes; it is certainly high time we ate," declared the Professor.

"Ah, just as I feared!" remarked the Colonel anxiously.

By this time they had passed through the door of the station-house. Outside stood one of those curious looking machines which Kearns and the Professor had seen rushing past them on the highway. On the front seat sat a man, apparently the driver. Behind him, in the body of the vehicle, were seats for four persons.

"Step in," said the Colonel cheerily. Turning to the cross-eyed man and his companion, he added warningly:

"Keep your mouths closed as to this matter. Not a word for the present!"

The two men thus addressed clicked their heels together and saluted.

"Home," said the Colonel to the driver, stepping into the vehicle, "but not too fast!"

The driver saluted, turned a lever and they were off.

"And now for a few words of explanation," said Kearns to the Colonel.

"Not a word, my good friends," said the Colonel with soothing patronage, "until you are thoroughly restored—invigorated—out of danger!"

"Out of danger?" exclaimed Kearns mystified.

"What may be your meaning, sir?" inquired the Professor.

Both stared at him as if he were a good-natured lunatic.

"After six weeks of fasting," said the Colonel diplomatically, "a man should be willing to go quietly to a meal, I think."

They had passed beyond the limits of the town and, having reached the highway, were flying along at a rapid rate. Such was their speed that Kearns and the Professor were not loth to hold their tongues and attend to the matter of breathing. Along the road they flew, finally turning down a side road and drawing up in front of an ornamented iron gate, opened to them by a lodge keeper; then down a winding path, bordered by trees, until they stopped before the steps of a stately house. The Colonel stepped out of the vehicle.

"Welcome to Idleslip!" he said as he politely assisted them to alight.

He led the way up the steps, across a spacious foyer and turned into one of the rooms to the left. Drawing up two comfortable armchairs, he motioned them to be seated.

"Do you feel very weak?" he inquired with anxious concern. "Shall I order you some refreshment, or don't you think it would be better to wait for the doctor?"

"Doctor!" cried Kearns. "I thank you. I have had all the doctor I want for some time to come."

"Doctor!" exclaimed the Professor, who regarded the question in a different light. "Let us cease playing at cross-purposes. May I ask you frankly, sir, why you think we need a physician?"

"Pray calm yourselves," urged the Colonel soothingly, "or, as I have already warned you, no one can foresee the results! See a doctor? Why not! After your remarkable—I may say, indeed, very extraordinary experiences ——"

"You refer to our sleep in the cave?" interposed the Professor. "By the way, is it really possible that we have slept six weeks? What is the date?"

"No, no," protested the Colonel. "Don't seek any explanation now. Wait until later."

"But this delay is exasperating," persisted the Professor. "All these strange happenings—this mystery—play upon my nerves! I must insist upon an immediate explanation. I must ask you, Colonel —Colonel—pardon me, but what is the name?"

"I am Colonel, Sir Maynard Cuming."

"*Sir* Maynard Cuming!" repeated Kearns mystified.

"*Sir* Maynard Cuming!" exclaimed the Professor, passing his hand over his eyes. "Let me ask you—is this the Republic of the United States, or have we in our sleep, or trance, been spirited into some foreign land?"

"The Republic of the United States?" said the Colonel with a curious smile; "Well — no!"

Kearns and the Professor rose to their feet.

Kearns' eyes were dilated, his hands clenched. The Professor was very pale.

"Speak!" he said. "What country is this and—the date—what?"

"Be calm," urged the Colonel. "It's not well you should be told these things now. Wait until later!"

The Professor advanced a step and spoke with all the concentrated energy of a thoroughly aroused man.

"Tell me the truth now," he said, "or I'll leave at once and seek it elsewhere."

The Colonel realized the situation had reached a climax. Something must be done.

"Since you will have it so," he replied gravely, "I will answer you. Prepare yourselves to hear calmly, bravely."

"Go on!" cried Kearns breathlessly.

"You are at present," answered the Colonel, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "upon my estate at Idleslip, seven miles from the county seat of Pemberton. You are in the Empire of the United States, within the realm of His Majesty, Imperial and Royal, William the First, Emperor of the United States, King of the Empire State of New York!"

His two auditors were staring at him wide-eyed, speechless. It was difficult to decide whether they took in the full sense of his words.

"The date," continued the Colonel with enforced calm, "is July the twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and seventy-five. You say you entered the cave June tenth, nineteen hundred. If your statement is correct, you have been in a state of suspended animation for seventy-five years!"

CHAPTER IV.

SEARCHING THE FILES

Seventy-five years!

For a moment both men stood breathless, stupefied. A groan was stifled upon Kearns' lips and he leaned heavily upon the table for support. The Professor stared blankly at the speaker, then put both hands to his face and dropped back in his chair.

Was this some grim and ghastly joke; some hideous vagary of delirium, or the night?

Alas, no!

The events through which they had passed; the unfamiliar scenes encountered; the appurtenances of the very room in which they sat; the manner of the Colonel—all proclaimed the absence of illusion and confirmed the existence of stern reality.

Seventy-five years!

Truly, only a brief span in the cycle of time, in the relentlessly automatic passage of the ages, but how much in the individual life of man. Seventy-five years ago—who inhabited the house, the spot, in which we live? What was our particular ancestor doing; what was he like; what were his thoughts, ideas, aspirations, hopes, ambitions, this day just seventy-five years ago? How many hustling, bustling, hoping, fearing, aspiring men and women who have since passed away and of whom to-day there is not a human being who knows that they ever were on earth. And—seventy-five years hence! Who will then oc-

cupy the house, the spot where we to-day live? Who then, as the days sweep by, will ever give a passing thought to us, or perchance even remember we ever existed?

So, then, three quarters of a century had passed and with the passage of time surroundings and conditions had also changed! And these two fortunate, or unfortunate, derelicts of the past — what of them? They were as relics of a bygone age; a species of human flotsam and jetsam cast up upon a foreign shore.

A sort of homesickness, a deadly nostalgia, was upon them. Instinctively they turned to each other for sympathy.

Kearns, with his stronger vitality and naturally high spirits, was the quicker to recover from the shock. He glanced down at his strong, knotted arm and wrist resting on the table. Even if he had been dead to the world for all these years, even if he was over a century old, his muscles were as strong as ever and the flow of life within him apparently unimpaired. And if a man's nerves have the courage and his heart beats strong and full as at thirty, what matter how many years have passed over his head! Such was the thought which surged through Kearns' mind. "A woman is as old as she looks, a man is as old as he feels," was the inconsequent and frivolous idea which kept jangling through his brain. How strange it is that in the most critical moments of our lives, the incongruous and the odd will persist in obtruding themselves upon our mental perception.

From the chaos of emotion the announcement had developed in Kearns, curiosity began to grow. He roused himself and turned to question the Colonel. But the latter proved obdurate.

"Not another word will I tell you," he declared;

"not another word until medical advice is at hand. You can understand the loss to the world and to science should anything happen to you at this stage. I've sent for the doctor. He'll be here shortly."

As the Colonel spoke there came a rap on the door and the servant announced the arrival of the Doctor.

"Show him in at once," ordered the Colonel. An instant later a very brisk little man, with red cheeks, black moustache and side whiskers, entered the room.

"Doctor Robinson O'Hanlenne," announced the Colonel, who proceeded to explain briefly the circumstances to the new arrival. From the Colonel's narrative it appeared that two of his workmen had been felling trees and laying out certain ground in a distant and hitherto unused portion of his estate. While thus engaged they had found the cave with the two inanimate forms carefully wrapped in rugs lying within. The Colonel told graphically the terror of the men as the supposed corpses revived, and their flight when a horse and carriage were demanded by Kearns.

"A horse and carriage!" exclaimed the Doctor, with a smile.

"Precisely; a horse and carriage!"

And both laughed.

"The two men," continued the Colonel, "ran to the foreman. Fortunately I happened to be with him. At the men's story I hurried to the cave. The peculiar and elaborate appointments of it astonished me. In a little side recess I found some curious notes and papers bearing on the subject of mesmeric forces and suspension of animation. From the ground I picked up a piece of money. It bore the date eighteen hundred and seventy-six. 'Come,' said I to myself, 'this piece of money must have been coined at the time of the Presidency of the famous

soldier, General Grant. Such money is surely not in general circulation now!' All of these strange occurrences began to give me a faint hint of the truth. Such cases are not entirely unknown to our modern science, I believe, although the duration of the sleep in this instance exceeds anything yet reported."

"Quite so," commented Dr. O'Hanlenne.

"I started on a hunt for my involuntary guests," continued the Colonel, with a smile at Kearns and the Professor. "On the Pemberton road I luckily encountered Mrs. Merriweather and her daughter, who had met two men who asked after strange places. These men had actually made inquiries for a horse and carriage."

Both the Colonel and the Doctor broke into a guffaw.

"Oh, yes," interjected the Professor. "I remember the old woman—a queer sort of person who talked about fourteen and fifteen o'clock and had never heard of a Presidential election."

Again the Colonel and the Doctor laughed.

"So you thought her language queer, did you?" exclaimed the Colonel. "Fourteen and fifteen o'clock sound strangely to your ears? Well; since your day we have changed the nomenclature of time somewhat and I think I may say without vanity we have improved upon your methods. Instead of your A. M. and P. M., which we moderns find awkward and cumbersome and likely to lead to confusion in certain instances, we divide the day and night into a straight twenty-four hours. Thus we count from midnight to midnight. One hour after noon is with us thirteen o'clock and the day closes at the last stroke of midnight, which we name twenty-four o'clock. Thus it would appear that old Mrs. Merriweather was not so much out of the way, after all."

"Oh, I see," replied the Professor, "but may I inquire how it was that she had never heard of the village of Averill and why so much anger on her part, and merriment on yours, over our very innocent inquiry for a conveyance?"

"What kind of a conveyance was it you asked for?" inquired the Colonel, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"A horse and carriage, sir," answered the Professor with dignity.

The Doctor coughed a discreet professional cough and pressed his handkerchief to his lips in an all too evident attempt to conceal his merriment. The Colonel laughed outright.

"Averill," said he, "as I happen to know from certain old documents I have had occasion to examine, was an old-time village long ago absorbed by the town of Pemberton. Its very name has disappeared from local memory. I am not astonished that Mrs. Merriweather could not recall it. As for your demand for a horse and carriage—why, my dear sir, it is many, many years since horses were used. With charging stations in every direction and our systems of drawing electricity from the clouds, no man could afford to deal with so slow, expensive and antiquated an object as a horse. They are still used for the purposes of racing and His Majesty, the King, on certain state occasions sits in the royal chariot drawn by four horses, but for all ordinary uses the horse has entirely disappeared. You might as well have called for a sedan chair."

"Oh!" said the Professor blankly. "I suppose I should have asked for a *voiter*. What, by the way, *is* a *voiter?*"

"Simply a modernized name for vehicle," replied the Colonel.

"Do you happen to have a public official named Waring?" asked Kearns.

"Yes," answered the Colonel. "He is the Imperial and Royal Commissioner of Highways, and the best man for the post we have ever had! How did you come to know of him?"

"I saw him stuck up on the sign-board," said Kearns absently.

"Stuck up on the sign-board!" exclaimed the Colonel, somewhat puzzled.

"Yes; his name was signed to the notice to travelers," explained Kearns.

"Oh, I see!" replied the Colonel.

"Well," said Kearns regretfully, "I'm rather sorry to learn about the retirement of the horses. I was always very fond of them."

"You will find a good phaermobile much more effective," answered the Colonel with a smile. "But," he continued turning to the Doctor, "I must continue my story. I followed our two friends along their course and the trail they had left was a pretty broad one. I finally traced them to the station-house."

"The station-house!" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Yes," answered the Colonel; "there on a charge of seditious utterances—in the position of conspirators against the peace and dignity of His Majesty, the King."

The Doctor laughed.

"I rescued them from their perilous situation," continued the Colonel, "and then came the most startling disclosure of all."

"Which was?" inquired the Doctor.

"They then informed me," said the Colonel solemnly, "that they had entered the cave and had been there since June the tenth, ninteen hundred!"

"Since June the tenth, nineteen hundred!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Extraordinary! Marvelous! Still the case is not without some precedents. The famous Doctor Fredicus, of Berlin, reports a case of suspended animation lasting for ten months, but anything like the lapse of time in this case is certainly without parallel."

"I trust that you do not doubt our word," said Kearns with dignity.

But the Professor turned upon him.

"Doubt our word!" he exclaimed. "Who could credit such a preposterous statement without some tangible evidence to support it. We must appear in the light of either falsifiers or lunatics!"

"Doubt your word!" exclaimed the Colonel impulsively. "I beg you not to think of such construction. There may be some mistake, some possible inaccuracy; but, if so, I am convinced it is entirely unintentional."

"Thank you," said the Professor gratefully; "I'm unable to think clearly just now owing to this very perplexing situation in which we find ourselves, but is there not some way by which our statement could be effectively tested and either proved, or disproved?"

"A good idea!" exclaimed Kearns. "Yes; surely there must be many ways. The newspapers, for instance; they must certainly have reported our disappearance. In your public libraries there are undoubtedly bound copies of the newspapers of that period. That is," he added, turning doubtfully to the Colonel, "if public libraries have not ceased to exist in these times, like the horse, the high ball, and other cherished institutions."

"No," answered the Colonel, laughing, "we still have public libraries, and noble ones, thanks to numerous karnegians on the part of wealthy decedents."

"Numerous what, did you say?" inquired Kearns.

"Karnegians," repeated the Colonel. "Oh, perhaps that's a new word to you. 'To karnegy' is a verb meaning the acquirement of a mania for post-mortem advertising and for leaving one's wealth to public institutions, to the disappointment of one's heirs. The noun 'karnegian' is defined as the gift of such character. But," continued the Colonel, "we need not resort to the public libraries. Here in my own library, which you will find a very fair one, there are bound newspaper files stretching back over a period of many years. The collection was begun by my grandfather and I have hoped I might complete it to a full century of newspapers."

"Might we inspect the files at once?" asked the Professor.

"Do you think it would be safe?" asked the Colonel, turning to the Doctor. "Would it not be better to postpone this until later and examine your patients at once?"

"Having slept seventy-five years," replied Kearns, "I assure you we are thoroughly rested and quite up to the test."

"When I do begin my examination," said the Doctor, "I shall want to make it a very thorough one. I suspect I shall find that animation has been absolutely suspended during this period and that nature will simply resume where she left off—just as after a night's sleep. If I refuse my patients' request it is likely to act upon the nervous system and possibly throw them into an irritated and excited condition. I think we might safely look into the matter now, provided they will first partake of a little light nourishment."

"Quite so," exclaimed the Colonel. "They must be fairly starved."

Under Dr. O'Hanlenne's directions, a light but nutritious meal was promptly served, which the two partook of with relish.

The repast over, the Colonel, followed by his guests, led the way across the hall to the elevator. He touched an electric button and they quickly ascended two stories. The Colonel then conducted them down the hall and into a magnificent library. Books lined the four walls from floor to ceiling.

"We'll find what we want here," said the Colonel, crossing to one corner of the library. "The files for that period are bound in four volumes to the year. Let we see — we want June, nineteen hundred. That will be the second volume of that year. Ah, here it is."

The Colonel picked out a big volume and laid it on one of the polished library tables.

"June the tenth is the date, I believe?" By the way," he added, turning to Kearns, "may I ask the names?"

"My name is Thomas Kearns and I am, or rather was——"

"What!" exclaimed the Colonel, with a start, "not Thomas Kearns, the famous Director of Police, the great Vidocq of that period, whose name has figured so often in the sensational romances of the writer, Branderhurst?"

"Well," replied Kearns modestly, "I believe I *was* pretty well-known in connection with police matters in my day, but you do me altogether too much honor. As for Branderhurst: I'm sorry, but I never heard of him!"

"True," said the Colonel, "he wrote after your day. What the French authors did for Vidocq, Branderhurst has done for you. You are known to our girls and boys, and readers of sensational litera-

ture generally, as a Fouche and a Vidocq rolled into one. In a word, as the great American Director of Secret Police."

"They didn't quite style it that way in my day," answered Kearns, "but I suppose it's all right. A rose under any other name would smell just as sweet! As for Branderhurst, I'm sure I'm obliged to him for acting as a gratuitous post-mortem press agent. What can I do to repay him, I wonder!"

"Not much, I fear," replied the Colonel, "inasmuch as poor Branderhurst, who was really a very talented poet and novelist, died in delirium tremens nearly a quarter of a century ago."

"Ah, I see," said Kearns apologetically; "it used to be much the same thing with writers in the old days."

"And now," inquired the Colonel, turning to the Professor, "may I ask your name?"

"Walter Stuart Dean," answered the Professor. "And," he added with a smile, "I fear I cannot lay any claim to distinction such as possessed by my friend here, for in my period I was nothing but a poor pedagogue and——"

But the Professor stopped abruptly, for both the Colonel and the Doctor had turned toward him with faces flushed and eager.

"Walter Stuart Dean!" repeated the Doctor.

"Walter Stuart Dean!" echoed the Colonel. "Are you the famous writer on political economy; the distinguished inventor and scientist?"

"Gentlemen," urged the Professor deprecatingly, "I beg you not to fall into any error. There is some mistake here. It is true I wrote a work on political economy, but far from making me famous, it cost me my position as one of the Faculty at the Chicago University. As for my investigations in science, what-

ever might have been the result, practically it was nothing, since at the critical moment I—I disappeared!"

"Mistake, eh!" cried the Colonel, eagerly interposing; "we will see about that!" And he hurried away to another part of the library, returning a moment later with a big encyclopedia.

"What do I find here?" he asked, consulting the index and rapidly turning over the pages. "Ah, here it is! 'Walter Stuart Dean, political economist, scientist and inventor; born at Springfield, Illinois, 1857, of poor but honest parents. Studied in the public schools and afterward at the University of Bonn, Germany, from which he graduated, 1880, with high honors. Filled the Chair of Professor of Sciences at the University of Chicago, 1890-1900, from which he retired owing to political persecution. Wrote several famous works on political economy and the economic conditions of the period; also a number of notable scientific treatises. His mysterious disappearance in 1900 was one of the sensations of the day. The date of his death and place of burial are unknown.' Now, sir, what do you say to that?" exclaimed the Colonel, tapping with his index finger upon the page before him. "Do you still think there is any mistake?"

"Hooray!" cried Kearns triumphantly, waving his hand in the air. "This is indeed a case of a man waking up to find himself famous. I congratulate you, Professor."

"Let me add my felicitations," said Dr. O'Hanlenne.

"And mine!" declared the Colonel.

"Thank you," replied the Professor, with the air of a man somewhat dazed.

"And now," exclaimed the Colonel, "having sol-

idly ensconced you in your respective niches of fame, let us continue our original line of research. Let us see if in these newspapers there is any account of your mysterious disappearance."

"Quite so," said Dr. O'Hanlenne.

"June tenth," began the Colonel, turning the paper, "no use looking on that date. June the eleventh. Ah! here we are. Phew! your disappearance did make a stir and your papers of that day understood the art of working up a sensation. See the great black headlines: 'Triple Tragedy! Death Amid the Lightning and the Storm. Mysterious Disappearances of a Famous New Yorker and his Companion. The Whole Countryside engaged in Organized Search for the Missing Ones.' Well, well, well, gentlemen! What more could you ask than that?"

All bent eagerly over the Colonel's shoulder and read. There was the whole story set forth; how Kearns and the Professor had been temporarily sojourning at Dr. Belden's well-known Sanatorium; how in the early afternoon of June tenth they had started out in company with Dr. Jaquet; their failure to return; the search which had followed and the finding of the dead body of Dr. Jaquet by the wayside, under the great oak, blasted and riven by the lightning stroke. The article went on to describe how all search for the Doctor's companions had so far proved utterly without result. Then followed biographical sketches of the missing men.

They turned over the files and saw how day after day the papers had kept up the sensation; how rewards were offered by the many friends of Thomas Kearns for any information as to his whereabouts, living or dead. Then came the news of a monster subscription for the purpose of thoroughly dragging

the rivers and otherwise continuing the search. Next came theories as to the causes of the disappearance. Had they become deranged and wandered away? This theory was discussed at length, but it hardly seemed tenable that two men should have simultaneously become mentally afflicted. Another theory was advanced that Kearns and his companion had been made away with by an organized band of malefactors, who either sought revenge upon Kearns or feared certain discoveries he might have made. Thus the news of the search and the various theories advanced kept up edition after edition, until the articles grew shorter and shorter and at last stopped altogether. The nine days' wonder had ceased longer to be a wonder; the mystery had passed into the long list of unsolved tragedies with which the past teems.

"What a queer thing it is," commented Kearns with a laugh, glancing over his biography, "that a man has to be dead before the world finds out how good and great he was."

"I think you will find that has been the case in all generations," replied the Colonel.

"And poor Dr. Jaquet!" remarked the Professor. "To think that he should have come to his end so tragically and so suddenly after leaving us!"

"Yes," answered Kearns moodily; "our setting out that June day would seem to have been an unfortunate event for all three of us!"

"Come, cheer up!" retorted the Colonel; "thank your lucky stars you are still alive and living in a world which I think you will find materially improved in many respects as compared to that of your time."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Kearns doubtfully, "tell us then, of this new world of yours."

"Not now," answered the Colonel; "your strength

and nerves have already been sufficiently tried. For the moment, I insist upon turning you over to the Doctor."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE PAST

"You ancient coxcomb!" exclaimed Kearns next morning, as he watched the Professor struggling with the intricacies of a new-fangled necktie, "to think of a man more than one hundred years old giving himself up to the vanities of life!"

"You, too, O venerable centenarian, seem to have given some attention in the same direction," retorted the Professor. "I must confess, though, that those knee-breeches and hose are very becoming to you, considering your advanced age!"

"You think so?" replied Kearns. "I must say that the clothes of this period are certainly more picturesque and quite as comfortable as those of our day."

As he spoke, he turned his eyes in the direction of an assortment of clothing which their host had sent up for their use. The styles had assuredly undergone a change from the long trousers and somber-hued clothes to which Kearns and the Professor had been accustomed. Knee-breeches and hose replaced the long trousers and the waistcoats were in lively patterns.

They had been conducted the night before to two comfortable adjoining rooms and after being carefully examined by Dr. O'Hanlenne, had partaken of a second light repast, succeeded by a sound night's rest. This morning the Doctor had again visited them be-

fore they were up and, after careful examination, had pronounced their condition sound, leaving them with assurances that they could safely resume the ordinary occupations of life. Then came a servant with an invitation from their host to join him at breakfast.

An hour later, at his guests' urgent request, the Colonel conducted them to the library there to impart to them information regarding the changed order of things. Having seated them in comfortable armchairs, the Colonel produced a box of cigars.

"You smoke?" he inquired.

Both assented.

"Well," laughed the Colonel, as he passed the box, "that's at least one custom which you will find has not changed."

The Colonel lighted his cigar and settled back in his chair, preparatory to opening his narrative.

"As you have already learned," he began, "this land in which we live is no longer the Republic of the United States of America. All that is changed. We live to-day in the Empire of the United States under the beneficent rule of His Majesty, Imperial and Royal, William the First, Emperor of the United States, King of the Empire State of New York, Grand Duke of Mexico and Costa Rica, Sovereign Lord of Cuba and the Philippines, Mikado of the Province of Ling-Toa, Nihor of Benaria. The states composing the old Republic of the United States have been consolidated into thirty states, each of which is governed by a Viceroy, excepting the Empire State of New York, of which the Emperor is King. Thus in national matters we refer to the Emperor, but in state matters to the King."

"An Empire and an Emperor!" gasped the Professor. "The Republic gone!"

"Who would ever have believed it!" cried Kearns.

"To our modern thinkers and writers," said the Colonel calmly, "the one great, inexplicable thing is that the people of the beginning of this century—the people of your time—did not plainly foresee just what has happened. As our leading historian, Goldstream, points out, all the history of the past, all the indications of the times, pointed clearly to this culmination. And I agree with Goldstream that it would really seem that it did not require a prophet, or the son of a prophet, to foreshadow what actually happened."

"I am deeply interested," said the Professor, "yet I do not quite follow your line of reasoning. Will you particularize a little more fully, please?"

"With pleasure," answered the Colonel. "As I have just remarked, Goldstream draws attention to the fact that the history of the past all pointed to the Empire. By this he refers to the history of all the old-time republics. What has that history been? First, a republic, and honest, sturdy simplicity; next, a growth of wealth, followed by a constantly increasing luxury. And what was the outcome of these conditions in all these republics? Class distinction, founded upon a plutocratic basis; and official and industrial corruption born of the wild scramble after wealth and its ostentatious fooleries. These conditions have ever proved the soil from which a ruling class has sprung, followed by a monarchy and an aristocracy. Read the ancient histories, and there you find it recorded again and again."

"That is quite true in many respects," said the Professor; "but what signs do you discover in our times which foreshadowed the passing the Republic and the installing of the monarchical institution?"

"The very first signs," answered the Colonel,

" are to be traced to the close of the nineteenth century. As can be gleaned from the literature of that period, sons of the rich men were beginning to ape the dress, the manners and the modes of speech of the gilded youth of England. A wave of what was then called Anglomania swept over the country. If a foreign nobleman, even a poverty-stricken German baron, or a beggarly Italian count, came into the country, he was fêted, entertained and run after by your Society and toadied to in a manner of which the smallest London shopkeeper, or the humblest *bourgeois* of the Paris *faubourgs* would have been ashamed. If an adventurer of that period called himself my Lord This or Sir Henry That, people straightway lost their heads and their money. I ask you if this has, or has not, been correctly reported?"

Kearns laughed. "What memories your words bring to me!" he said. "I could tell you of some extraordinary cases. But don't let me interrupt."

"The beginning of this century," continued the Colonel, "found your Republic of the United States growing rapidly in wealth, in luxury, and in class distinctions. The literature of the times points clearly to the existence of a class which considered itself superior to the ordinary citizen. Some of the writers of the period seem to have placed the numbers of this class at four hundred, but this originally limited number must certainly have largely increased later on, as new fortunes were made and new millionaires sprang into existence."

"The Four Hundred!" exclaimed Kearns. "Why, that was originally regarded as a species of joke sprung by one Ward McAllister."

"It evidently turned out a pretty grim joke for the Republic!" retorted the Professor dryly.

"All these things were straws clearly indicating

the direction to which the wind was veering," resumed the Colonel. "A large percentage of the members of this class, denominated even in the days of the Republic as 'High Society,' lived in Europe, where they could bask in the sunshine of aristocracy and at times even creep within the shadow of a throne. The one dream of the members possessed of marriageable daughters in this 'High Society' was to marry off such daughters to European aristocrats. The multi-millionaires of the period aspired to a match with an English Duke or Earl; those of lesser millions were compelled to put up with a French Count, or a German Baron. No woman was too beautiful, no *dot* too great, provided a title were involved. No personality was too repulsive, no reputation or character too vile, provided they were gilded over by a patent of nobility. Do the chronicles that tell of these things lie, or do they record the truth?"

"The frozen truth!" answered Kearns curtly.

"Then how can you say," cried the Colonel triumphantly, "that the coming events did not cast their shadows before? What meant these things if not an aching and a longing for aristocracy? And you can't very well have an aristocracy without a monarchy! It is the most natural sequence of events in the world," continued the Colonel argumentatively; "first wealth, next luxury, then a desire to be distinguished above the common herd. After all the physical appetites are satisfied comes the craving for honors and distinction, for decorations and titles!"

"But," interposed the Professor with a bewildered air, "how came the People—the masses of the People—to ever submit to these changes?"

"Tut! Tut! The People!" exclaimed the Colonel contemptuously. "How much had they to say in the matter! The power of the People is one of

those cant phrases, founded on a popular delusion, which have always existed. In theory, the power of the People is supreme; in reality, a myth. Take it during the past two thousand years. In all these centuries the great masses of the people have been poor, hardworking; their lives replete with stint and suffering. The Few have been rich, pampered, over-indulged and contented. Do you think the masses of the People were really satisfied with this order of things? Do you not believe that they, both as individuals and as a mass, would infinitely have preferred a more even distribution of the good things of this world? At any time and in any country, these masses, had they been organized and united in purpose, could in a day have changed the conditions and brought about this coveted distribution. But they never have been so organized and united, and the special class has ever governed the masses. True, there were your labor unions and your great strikes. Contractors and employers, great and small, were bullied and at times even beaten in the various struggles which ensued, but this really amounted to nothing. Whenever the People really began to grow dangerous and to threaten the existing order of things, the soldiers came forth—soldiers, mark you, drawn from the masses—and the trouble was promptly put an end to."

"But how about the popular vote?" inquired the Professor.

"The popular vote," echoed the Colonel with a sneer. "Another delusion! One set of professional politicians set up a platform against another platform devised by another set of professional politicians and both invite the popular vote. The good people would vote for the one, or for the other; but how much was the popular interest, or the popular will, really repre-

sented by either? It is true that from time to time reformers sprang up and sought to create new parties and new issues more closely representative of the popular weal and the popular will. How much headway did they make? Defeat by the trained political organizations, commanding ample means and patronage, was invariably the ultimate fate of any such efforts. The really able man preferred to accept the existing conditions and make the best of them. He realized the futility of such undertakings and understood that the rôle of Reformer and the rôle of Martyr were only too closely allied."

"But in a supreme question," objected the Professor, "such as the overthrow of the Republic, I should have thought that a naturally free, assertive people, such as the people of the United States, would have made their power felt."

"Another popular fallacy!" laughed the Colonel. "The people of the United States are a brave people —valorous in war; pushing, clever, enterprising in times of peace. They exalt national heroes to the skies one day, only to pull them down the next. They are super-sensitive to adverse criticism and delight in being told they are the greatest and best of the earth. These are among their many little peculiarities, but to describe them as a people strongly assertive of their rights is to describe wrongly."

"I can't agree with you," said the Professor bluntly.

"Look back fairly and impartially," answered the Colonel gently, "and I think you will find my words borne out. Take New York—your own city and in your own times. Was ever in any land, or at any period, such arbitrary disregard of the People's rights submitted to with practically not a murmur of dissent? Do you question this?"

"I will leave it to you to make out your own case," retorted the Professor.

"Make out my case," returned the Colonel with warmth; "very well, then! Is it or is it not true that valuable franchises belonging to the People were acquired by trick and device far below their actual value? Is it or is it not true that official corruption was openly and notoriously rampant on every side; that judges sat upon the bench because they were the political creatures of a political boss; nominated and elected, not because of their integrity, or knowledge of the Law, but at the behest of a party leader? The same conditions prevailed amongst the prosecuting officers, so that Justice itself was sullied at her very fountain head. Your police force was nothing more nor less than an organized banditti, clothed with the uniform of law and order and paid by the People; but dispensing oppression and levying blackmail right and left. Am I citing individual cases, or acts done occasionally and in secrecy? Indeed not! The chronicles of your time recite that all this was a matter of daily occurrence and common notoriety—that the very children making mud pies in your gutters knew of it. Then, too, the pages of municipal history are seared with the shameful record of an executive officer who, with others, manipulated a corner in a certain product necessary to the rich and poor. The chronicles record how the conspirators controlling the corner forced up the price at a time when the product was most needed to relieve suffering. The price was prohibitive to the poor. And the women and the little children in your teeming tenements laid down their lives — hundreds upon hundreds of them. But the corner was piling up money for your officer and his associates, and they heeded not the cries of death and despair. The papers of the time were re-

plete with itemized accounts of the suffering, but none raised a hand to stop the iniquity. Is this true, or does history lie?"

"But the People," exclaimed the Professor, "were not responsible — they did not approve——"

"Approve!" cried the Colonel explosively; "much credit to them for that! Do you think the People of England, or of France, would have thus tamely submitted? Even in darkest Russia, do you not think there would have been a few signs of lack of approval in the shape of bombs? Was there a violent ebullition of popular wrath? Was there an outbreak such as might have recalled the French Revolution of 1789? No; your free and assertive citizens tamely submitted. The corporations kept their franchises; the men of the soiled ermine retained their positions on the bench; the police force, despite investigations and exposures, continued, haughty and arrogant, to ply its nefarious traffic; and it is recorded that the officer to whom I have referred was allowed to quietly and profitably serve out his term. Do I state facts, or fiction?"

"You are stating only the truth," said Kearns sturdily.

"And the franchises which were robbed from the People!" cried the colonel. "What was done with them? Not content with securing these valuable franchises infinitely below their actual worth, the holders proceeded to form corporations whose stock was watered to an absurd extent. Upon this watered stock dividends had to be earned. And how were these dividends earned — by the transportation companies of the great cities, for instance? By treating the people — to whom these companies owed their corporate existence — like dogs, and transporting them as they would not have dared to trans-

port cattle. Men, women and children were herded in the street cars of your day as animals were never herded. Thus year in and year out were the great and supposedly all-powerful People treated. And for what? All for the benefit of a comparatively tiny coterie of men, who derived the profit. And the People submitted tamely as any band of sheep, did they not? The power of the people, indeed!"

"Come, Colonel!" exclaimed the Professor; "it seems to me that you are somewhat intolerant of the shortcomings of the people of our day."

"Pardon me," replied the Colonel hastily, "if I have said anything to offend, though I have only recited a few facts as taken from the chroniclers of your own times. Of course, we have our faults and our evils; but not such as these. Thank God, such things could not be under the Empire! Thank God, such would not be tolerated under the benefi-cent rule of His Majesty, the King! Long live the Empire! God save the King!"

CHAPTER VI

THE STAR OF EMPIRE

"You would doubtless prefer to hear how the great changes which have taken place were brought about and learn of the events which led up to them," continued the Colonel. "For this we must go back to the beginning of the century and the days when the various great Trusts began to grow into maturity and strength. Just prior to the beginning of the century had come the formation of the gigantic financial organizations known as the Trusts. That is to say, they were regarded as gigantic in that day, though as a matter of fact they had not yet assumed the really colossal proportions they later attained. They were then in their infancy, so to speak."

"I can recall," remarked Kearns, "a little billion-dollar concern. Surely that was a pretty solid, bouncing infant!"

"A beggarly, puny infant?" retorted the Colonel, "as compared to those born later. The Trusts grew until business upon anything but a colossal scale was an impossibility and the smaller manufacturer and the middleman were wiped out. In the course of time, by a brilliant series of consolidations, seven great Trusts were formed which practically absorbed the business of the country. The fields covered by these Trusts were respectively: Alimentation, Transportation, Manufacturing, Land, Ores and Minerals, Retailing, and finally, the great Miscellaneous

Trust which took in pretty well everything not embraced by the others. These main Trusts subdivided their respective fields between numerous subsidiary Trusts; but these subsidiary Trusts all operated subject to the direction of the general head of that particular Trust. The methods adopted by these organizations involved the ruthless crushing out of all outside competition. For instance, the Retailing Trust would start in by founding baker shops all over a given city, and would sell bread at the actual cost of production. With the enormous resources at the disposal of the Trust, this plan of operations could be kept up indefinitely. What was the result? All rivals were forced either to sell out to the Trust, or go to the wall. Similar methods of procedure were adopted in other branches of retail industry, one after the other, until the cream of the retail trade in all the great cities was practically in the hands of the Trust. It was a case of steady absorption. To oppose the Trust meant ruin and this speedily came to be very thoroughly understood. Another example is the Alimentation Trust, which deals with the foodstuffs, both solid and liquid, of the country. With its enormous resources, it was enabled to corner the raw material in one product after another until all competition was forced out of existence."

"And what did the People say to all this?" inquired Dean.

"They fussed and fumed a good deal," answered the Colonel, "but they submitted — just as they submitted in your day to the cornering Chief Magistrate, the corrupt judges, the official rascality, and the oppressions of the transportation companies. At first, inspired by the fulminations of certain newspapers, organs of the populace, they assumed a rather

threatening attitude; but this soon died out. The great Miscellaneous Trust founded newspapers, covering immense fields of news. The highest talent in the land was employed. The papers were delivered free of charge throughout the city and surrounding country. Money was no object. The dry-goods business, the soap industry and the patent-medicine output being all controlled by the Trusts, the field of general advertising was well in their hands. Consequently the independent newspapers were either sold out to and absorbed by the Trust organs, or perished from lack of advertising patronage."

"I'll bet they said some tart things before they expired," exclaimed Kearns.

"Frantic were their death shrieks!" replied the Colonel. "However, as these disturbing factors gradually disappeared, the people became more calm and more accustomed to the existing state of things. They began to perceive that the Trusts were, after all, not an unmixed evil. While the Trusts made enormous profits, yet the cost to the consumer, owing to the reduction in the expenses of handling and production, was materially reduced. The merchants and manufacturers, the middlemen and retailers who had been crowded out of business found positions with the different Trusts, where they worked less hard and had more freedom from financial cares than they had known when they were in business for themselves. And the Trusts were very shrewd. While the bulk of their enormous capital stock was controlled by certain individuals, yet a quantity of the stock was put out among the masses of the people, whose interest in this way became bound up with the Trusts. Besides this, each of the Trusts, of course, employed vast armies of people. These employees, after attaining a certain age, were pensioned and

their lives insured, in consideration of payments deducted from the weekly, or monthly, wage. This created a vast host of people throughout the land whose financial interests, or whose entire future prospects, were identified with the Trusts. Now, self-interest is a very powerful incentive and these very people were among the firmest supporters of the Trusts. In the meantime, the United States was rapidly taking its position as the foremost commercial, manufacturing and exporting country in the world, and this expansion of trade kept times good and things prosperous generally. Do you follow me?"

"To quite an extent," answered Kearns.

"There are many questions I wish to ask," said the Professor, "but I prefer to reserve them until later and not interrupt your narrative."

"Very well," continued the Colonel. "We now come to the year 1963 — the time of the outbreak of the great battle of the Trusts. At that period, William Rockingham, the richest man in the world and the head of the great Miscellaneous Trust, was President of the United States. He was the last to fill that office. For a number of years there had been discord between the Directorates of certain of the seven great Trusts, growing out of charges and counter charges of one infringing upon the fields of the other. The discord developed into war. It was a war of billions. For a long time the strife raged, but at last it became plain with whom victory would rest. The defeated ones, men of resources and of influence, in the bitterness of defeat, brought charges against the President and sought to impeach him. It was charged that he had used his official position as President to secure the victory to the Miscellaneous Trust, of which he was the head, and

its allies. A bitter political fight ensued, followed by an armed uprising."

"The term of the President," continued the Colonel, "was drawing to a close and preparations being made for the usual presidential nominations. The heads of the great Trusts, flushed by their recent success, got together and the cry went up that the constantly recurring elections were a cause of commercial disturbance and that a frequently changing occupant of the presidential chair was a source of national insecurity and of weakness in the country's foreign relations. The politicians were set to work and a constitutional amendment proposed, in accordance with which the President was to be elected for life and Congress was authorized to institute such other changes in the national form of government as might be deemed necessary for the public welfare and safety. William Rockingham received the nomination from the party which advocated these constitutional changes. I will not analyze how it came to pass. The election which ensued was a complete triumph for him. The constitutional amendment was sanctioned by the popular vote and William Rockingham found himself elected President for life, with a Congress, under the leadership of the great Marquanna, obedient to his lightest word."

"The opening wedge!" commented Dean.

"There were charges advanced in connection with this election," resumed the Colonel, "and the uprising I have mentioned became more formidable than ever. Rumors began to be circulated broadcast that certain classes were paving the way to a monarchy. With a permanent President and a Congress obedient to his every behest, the country might as well, the cry went up, have a King at once."

"I begin to see the trend of events," murmured Dean.

"A King at once! And why not?" continued the Colonel. "The country was certainly ripe for it. The successful Trust controllers favored it and behind them, as I have shown, were armies of people whose entire interests were bound up in the Trusts and who, consequently, favored whatever the Trusts desired. The officers of the Army and of the Navy favored it. Class distinction had ever flourished in their ranks and a monarchy would mean that crosses and decorations and all the brilliancy and advantages of a court, as enjoyed by military and naval officers in Europe, would be theirs. Society, of course, was in favor of it to a unit and to the great majority of the women throughout the land the proposition seemed to come as a not displeasing novelty. In a word, while there was bitter opposition to the idea in many quarters, yet it did not want for enthusiastic supporters in countless directions. As for Marquanna, the great political chieftain, he boldly came out with the declaration that the feature of a constantly changing President had become intolerable and that the country's urgent need was greater stability and permanence in its executive head. He was not prepared to say whether the mere election of the President for life would sufficiently satisfy the country's demands in this respect."

"A bold leader! He had at least courage, if nothing else!" remarked Dean.

"Owing to the condition of unrest in various parts of the country," continued the Colonel, "martial law was proclaimed and the regular army was brought into active play. In the midst of the general turmoil and confusion, Congress, under the leadership of Marquanna, decided to take advantage of the recent constitutional amendment which provided that such other and further action might be taken

in modifying the form of national government as for the welfare and safety of the people might be deemed necessary. Boldly the resolution was sprung providing that the existing Republic be transformed into a hereditary monarchy, with the life President as the Sovereign. By a substantial majority this was carried. A cabinet was quickly formed; the boundaries of the various states were rearranged and the number of states reduced by consolidation to thirty, with a Viceroy governing each; New York state was declared the premier state, with the Ruler of the Empire as its hereditary King, and the seat of government was transferred from Washington to New York; Marquanna was created Duke of Marquanna, taking his title from the beautiful country seat which bears his family name, and was also made Chancellor of the Empire; crosses and orders were distributed among the officers of the Army and the Navy, and the great men of the country were ennobled according to their respective degrees of prominence and influence. Within sixty days the uprisings were successfully crushed out by the army and the leaders and instigators tried on charges of High Treason and executed, or imprisoned. Then sprang into existence the most brilliant and luxurious Court the world had yet known. With imposing ceremonies the first American monarch was crowned, amid the applauding tributes of the Kings and peoples of monarchical Europe."

"And this is the — the — King who now rules?" asked Dean.

"Yes," replied the Colonel. "His Majesty, William the First, has since then reigned and his reign has been one glorious in war and successful in peace, as I shall have occasion to explain to you later. The King is a man of great capabilities — able, sagacious

and of strong will, but of late years he has grown very fond of the gayeties of life, so much so that, like Charles II. of England, he is often referred to as 'The Merry Monarch.' The brilliancy of his Court has grown apace, and indeed it exceeds that of any other reigning sovereign. But amid all this glitter and gayety the affairs of State are well looked after. The officers of the Chancellerie are in the palace itself, and still at the helm is the stern old Chancellor — the great American Lord Chancellor, His Grace, the Duke of Marquanna."

CHAPTER VII.

THE POT CALLS THE KETTLE BLACK

"And who was the most beautiful woman of that time and — and — what did she look like? Oh, do tell me all about it. I'm so interested!"

So prattled away Beatrice, daughter of Colonel Sir Maynard Cuming, sprightly and eighteen, as she sat at the head of the breakfast table, and daintily served Kearns and the Professor with their tea. The Colonel was a widower and this little lady — half woman, half child still — with her handsome dark eyes and arch, impetuous ways was his only daughter.

"Do tell me all about it," she continued pleadingly. "I want to know all about her. The books — histories and things like that — tell a lot of things which are not at all interesting and leave out the most important things of all. Who was the most beautiful woman?"

Both Kearns and the Professor seemed quite perplexed.

The Colonel laughed. "Now you are confronted with a poser," he said. "This might be a rather awkward question under some circumstances, but you can certainly answer it without danger of making any particular lady jealous."

"Now, papa," protested Beatrice, "please don't interrupt and lead away from my question."

"I fear it is useless to appeal to me, Miss Cum-

ing," finally answered the Professor. "My friend, I imagine, is better qualified to answer such a question."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" exclaimed Kearns; "I've noticed that you scientists, for all your air of scientific abstraction, have very often an exceedingly keen eye to feminine charms and graces. Who was the most beautiful woman? How can one answer such a question when all the women of — of — our day were so beautiful! In those days, to walk up Broadway from Twenty-third to Thirty-fourth streets, on a bright afternoon, was to see a galaxy of American beauty and Paris fashions pass in review."

"Broadway, between Twenty-third and Thirty-fourth streets," repeated Miss Beatrice. "Where is that, papa?"

"Oh, my dear," answered the Colonel, "that's a part of the city given over entirely to the business section. You have never been there."

"I see!" answered Beatrice thoughtfully. "But what did you say about Paris fashions, Mr. Kearns? Did the ladies in those days get their fashions from Paris?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Kearns. "Paris was then considered the great centre from which all the fashions in dresses and bonnets were procured."

"What a funny idea!" laughed the girl. "To-day," she continued proudly, "our capital and our Court give the fashions to the world."

"I'm glad to learn it," exclaimed Kearns with enthusiasm. "It should have been the same in our day, as far as New York and the fashions were concerned. As a matter of fact, it was so to a greater extent than was then generally imagined. Dresses and hats which were labeled as made in Paris were,

in reality, manufactured in New York. American skill and taste really were matchless, but the popular fad of that day was to demand Paris-made articles and the enterprising shop-keeper filled that demand by furnishing Paris goods — made in America."

"All that is changed now," said the Colonel. "As Trixy says, to-day American fashions concededly lead the world."

A servant entered, extending to the Colonel a silver salver upon which lay a letter.

"Pardon me," said the Colonel, as he broke the seal. "Ah! this is indeed news!" he exclaimed, as he rapidly read. "We are shortly to have with us a most distinguished visitor."

"Who is it, papa?" inquired Beatrice with curiosity.

"General Mainwarren," answered the Colonel. "I must tell you about him before he arrives," he added, turning to his guests. "General Mainwarren, who, by the way, is a distant cousin of ours, was a most distinguished soldier during the war with Russia."

"What! Has the United States been at war with Russia?" exclaimed Kearns and the Professor in a breath.

"Yes," answered the Colonel, "that is one of the many events which I have not yet had an opportunity to tell to you. Our commercial interests with Great Britain became so great, and the amount of our surplus capital invested in British enterprises so large, that a defensive alliance with that country grew to be a matter of necessity. When the integrity of the British Empire and incidentally the safety of our commercial interests came to be imperiled by the encroachments of the great barbaric Power of the North, it was found necessary for the United States to step in and lend a helping hand. The war with

Russia was long and bloody and Napoleon's famous invasion of the Russian Empire was duplicated by the allied armies of the United States and Great Britain. Great battles were fought; great victories were won and — needless to say — we eventually triumphed."

"How could it be otherwise! What can withstand the Anglo-Saxon race!" exclaimed the Professor proudly.

"To think that all this should have been going on and I asleep!" cried Kearns regretfully.

"But I must hurry and tell you about General Mainwarren," continued the Colonel. "As I said before, he distinguished himself during this war with Russia; became the pride of the people and the idol of his soldiers. After the war, he fell into disfavor, owing to views which were regarded as — as — disloyal. He was opposed to the general economic conditions — to the Trusts and the power wielded by them. This was strange, inasmuch as his elder brother was the head of the great Ores and Minerals Trust, of which the Coal Trust was one of the subsidiary organizations. I never knew the precise rights of the matter, but the General fell into disfavor and was retired from active service on half pay. He was not honored with a title as had been officers of far less distinguished service, but was studiously ignored in this respect by the Sovereign. For a brief period he lived in comparative poverty and obscurity. His brother's only son was fatally injured one day in an accident. The news was carried to the young man's father. He was an old man and its suddenness overwhelmed him. He dropped where he stood and never recovered consciousness. Everything he possessed had been left to his only son and this son survived the father by only a few hours, dying in-

testate. His uncle, the General, was the only relative and he inherited everything as the heir-at-law of the son. Thus, in one day, he saw himself lifted into the position of one of the richest men in the country."

"What a strange turn of fortune!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Yes," answered the Colonel; "but that is not all there is to tell. After he came into these immense properties, a change seemed to pass over him. Where before he had figured as the friend of the masses, he now appeared as the direct reverse. In fact, various industrial measures adopted by him were of so grasping, uncompromising and offensive a character as to draw forth widespread condemnation. Even the government protested. It regarded his line of action as calculated to foment public discontent and was, therefore, a menace. And so it came about that where his championship of popular rights had before drawn upon him the displeasure of the Throne, he was now in disfavor at Court for his radical course in precisely the opposite direction. Curious, is it not?"

"That's the way of mankind," commented Kearns. "It was the same in our day. One kind of a man in adversity and a totally different kind of a man in prosperity. How often one sees that!"

"I don't care what they say of Cousin Mainwarren," interposed Beatrice warmly. "I believe he has a kind heart. But to come back to our subject," she added, addressing Kearns, "is it true that the ladies at that time ——"

Her question was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who announced the arrival of General Mainwarren. The Colonel hurried out to receive him.

A few moments later he returned, accompanied

by a man of most striking personality. He was tall beyond the usual height, broad shouldered and massive, with a large, strong face, every line and contour of which was indicative of resolution and power.

The new-comer greeted Beatrice with cheery courtesy and the Colonel presented General Mainwarren to his guests.

"I need not disguise from you, gentlemen," said the General, "that I know of the experiences through which you've passed. The wildest rumors on the subject are current in Pemberton and the newspapers are full of them. However, I trust you won't allow this to distress you. May I ask how you like the new condition of things?" The General turned a keen and searching glance upon them as he put the question.

"Well," laughed the Professor, "it used to be the custom with the reporters of our day, when foreigners landed upon our shores, to inquire how they liked the country. As the visitor's actual experience consisted of a five minutes' sojourn on the dock, the question was naturally difficult to answer. It seems to me we are much in the same position."

"So you are," answered the General, smiling. "I may say to you, however, that you will find things much changed — much improved in some respects, you will, perhaps, decide."

"How do you happen to be traveling this way?" asked Beatrice, with a woman's curiosity.

"Ah," said the General, with a light laugh, "there's a story connected with that. I've been favored with a special summons to attend at Court — to be received in special audience by His Majesty and the Chancellor."

The Colonel looked up sharply and turned a quick, inquiring glance upon the speaker.

"There — is — no — new — trouble?" he faltered.

"I don't know," said the General lightly. "It is usually a sign of favor for a subject to be summoned to attend the Court of the King. In my case perhaps ——"

He stopped abruptly and glanced toward Beatrice.

The young lady rose quickly from the table.

"I know you want to discuss business and politics and horrid things of that kind," she exclaimed petulantly, "so I'll disappear. But you and I," she continued, turning to the General, "will have a little *tête-à-tête* before you leave, won't we? If you are going to Court, you can take a message to Dorothy."

"Certainly," smilingly answered the General, and Beatrice tripped from the room.

"I think we might take a turn in the garden," remarked the Professor to Kearns.

"No, no; please don't go," exclaimed the General. "I'll be indebted if you will remain. I would like to have your opinion on certain matters."

"You are sure?" said the Professor hesitatingly.

"Quite, quite sure," declared the General. "Pray be seated."

The Professor sank back into his seat.

"There's some trouble, I feel convinced," said the Colonel with an air of concern.

"Well," answered General Mainwarren, "I'll relieve you of any suspense. I've been summoned to Court to confer with the Emperor and his Chancellor regarding certain operations contemplated by the Coal Trust, of which," he added with an explanatory wave of the hand to the Professor and Kearns, "I am the head."

"Yes, yes," interjected the Colonel; "but what's the nature of these new operations?"

"Simply this," replied the General carelessly; "it has been decided, to describe the plan briefly, to withhold the output of coal and to force up the price during the coming winter to fifteen crowns the ton."

"No, no; surely not!" cried the Colonel.

"It has been decided and will be done," said General Mainwarren firmly. "The Sovereign, the Chancellor and the Imperial Council are much exercised, I understand, in view of the effect it is likely to have upon the masses. Hence my summons to Court! And," continued the General, turning to the Professor, "what do you say to this plan? You had certain experiences of this kind in your day, did you not?"

"I must decline to express an opinion," answered the Professor coldly. "I'm not sufficiently familiar with existing conditions to express an opinion. How am I to know what will be the effect upon the people at large?"

"It will result in widespread suffering and distress; in misery of the most dreadful kind," said the Colonel, sadly.

"Say, if you like," replied General Mainwarren with brutal directness, "that it will result in widespread desolation and death. You may speak out. I'm not thin-skinned and don't mind hearing the truth. Many factories must close and tens of thousands will be thrown out of work; to say nothing of the misery and death which will ensue from actual cold. Hence the Court is exercised; hence it sends for me, but — it will be in vain!"

"And you," said the Professor, turning horror-stricken eyes upon the speaker, "realizing all these things, will still persist in your course!"

"Absolutely and unalterably," answered the General sternly. "I've been sent for to present myself

at Court. I'll be wheedled, pleaded with, threatened and cajoled, but — it will be for naught. Ah, you seem astonished. What, then, is the view you take?"

"Sir," said the Professor, rising, his eyes flashing in indignation and anger, "you have twice asked my opinion and I'll give it, fully and freely, as man to man. I consider that any man who will heartlessly throw tens of thousands of working men out of employment; who will expose tens of thousands to misery and want; who will let women and children languish and die from privation and cold, is a monster in human form — a fiend incarnate! His fellow men should turn from him in horror and in loathing; his mother reproach herself that she gave him birth. That's my opinion, sir. God created these coal lands for the benefit of humanity in general. It is preposterous to suppose that He created them for the exclusive benefit of any one man, or set of men. The government that permits such action as you wish to take is unworthy to stand; it should be swept out of existence!"

"My dear Professor!" interjected Kearns, endeavoring to allay his companion's warmth; "are you not a little too vehement?"

"You will pardon me," said the Professor, turning to Colonel Cuming, "but I can't retract, or even modify, my words. I thank you for your kindly hospitality, which I have but ill-repaid. I'll now withdraw from your presence and your house."

General Mainwarren had listened with flushed face and contracted brows.

"No, no," he interposed hastily, "no apology is either necessary or proper. I asked your opinion; you've given it. An honest opinion is always deserving of respect; the more frank and outspoken, the better it is. That which I take exception to is not

the words themselves, but at such words from you — you!"

"From me!" exclaimed the Professor. "And why particularly from me?"

"From you, sir," continued the General, with fiery emphasis, "or from any man of your day. Isn't it to the men of your day that we owe the examples we follow? If I mistake not it was precisely the men of your time who first taught to this land the lesson of the concentration of capital; wasn't it your capitalists who first promulgated the theory of their divine appointment to the control of the good things of this world?"

"That theory was the theory of the Few; not of the Many," objected the Professor.

"It was certainly tolerated and permitted by the people of your time," retorted General Mainwarren, "and in pursuing my course I'm only following out that which has been a sanctioned time-honored custom. If the people objected to these things, the proper time to have stopped them was when they first began. I forgive your words, Professor Dean; I bear no rancor. But such words coming from a man of your era is, upon my honor, like the pot calling the kettle black!"

The Professor was about to reply, but his answer was cut short by the entry of a servant, bringing a card to Colonel Cuming. The Colonel took the card from the salver, glanced at it and gave a direction to the servant, who immediately retired.

Rising and holding between his fingers the card which had been brought to him, he faced the others:

"A messenger from His Majesty, the King," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. KEARNS HAS A PREMONITION.

For some moments after the Colonel had left the room the three men sat in silence. Then General Mainwarren turned to the Professor.

"You will forgive me if my words have been too blunt," he said courteously; "but students of sociology agree that the conditions of the present epoch had their origin in your day; that such origin can be distinctly traced back; and that with the men of your time lies the responsibility for whatever exists today."

"And you, I trust, will pardon any undue warmth on my side," replied the Professor, "but this I must say; however much you may be disposed to blame the people of my day, you, personally, if you will permit me to say so, seem disposed to carry out measures far more arbitrary and drastic than were ever adopted in our time."

"You refer to the measures I spoke of in relation to the coal supply?" asked General Mainwarren.

"Yes. Certainly you don't claim that God, or Nature — call it what you will — placed those deposits exclusively for your benefit and that you can deal with them absolutely as you will, regardless of the rights, interests or welfare of humanity in general?"

"It was ill-advised," retorted the General, slowly and with emphasis, "for you to raise that point.

If you will remember, it was in your time that that very point was first set up."

"I fail to recall ——"

"Surely not! Wasn't it in your day that the claim was for the first time advanced that these very coal deposits were vested in certain hands by divine appointment and that the right to manage such properties must be left solely and entirely to the discretion of those whom the Almighty had so selected? Wasn't this question of divine right advanced, for the first time in the history of the Republic, in your day and — successfully maintained?"

"How successfully maintained?"

"Can you even question! I have studied carefully the history of the time and I at least know my facts. Wasn't the situation then critical enough? The operators withheld the output. The people were perishing from cold. Death stalked abroad. Had not the State Government ample power to declare that the public health and safety required the seizure of those lands, with compensation, of course, to the owners? This sovereignty right of eminent domain was invoked when it was a question of putting through a new street, or creating a right of way for some quasi-public corporation. But when it came to exercising the right against a powerful corporation, it seems your suffering people feared to even whisperingly advocate the measure. So," continued the General, "the people were permitted to languish and die and the theory of divine right took its birth and, as you perceive, has flourished apace since then."

"By George! there's a good deal of truth in what you say!" exclaimed Kearns.

"When did these events occur to which you have referred?" questioned the Professor.

"Early in the present century," replied the General.

"We must distinctly disclaim responsibility for anything occurring after June the tenth, nineteen hundred," declared the Professor, with a smile.

"True, I had forgotten that!" replied General Mainwarren with a laugh.

"But what I don't understand," said the Professor, again grown serious, "is that you, who seem to so thoroughly grasp and understand these evils, should be willing to actively engage in their perpetuation."

Before General Mainwarren could reply to this home-thrust, the door opened and Colonel Cuming reappeared.

"Can you imagine," he exclaimed with evident excitement, "the errand of the royal messenger?"

"Oh, to hurry Somebody on his journey, of course — before we've had half a chance of enjoying his society," pouted Beatrice, who had followed the Colonel into the room. "A summons to Court ——"

"A summons to Court — that part is right," interrupted the Colonel, "but you haven't guessed rightly as to whom. The message is this: 'His Majesty commands Colonel Sir Maynard Cuming to repair at once to Court and to bring with him his notable guests, Professor Walter Stuart Dean and Mr. Thomas Kearns, the details concerning whose remarkable experiences His Majesty has learned with much interest.' What do you say to that?"

Both the Professor and Kearns stood agape with astonishment. Beatrice's voice was the first to break the silence.

"And do I go, too, papa?"

"Certainly, my dear — if you wish."

"If I wish! Well, yes; I decidedly do. Just think of the fun of going to Court and seeing cousin Dorothy. My cousin, Dorothy," she added, as an explanatory interjection for the benefit of the Professor

and Kearns, "is one of the maids of honor to the Queen."

"Yes," added General Mainwarren, "and she is as popular at the Court as she is beautiful, which in this case is saying much."

"Ah, my dear," exclaimed the Colonel wistfully, "you haven't seen Dorothy since you were quite a little girl. I fear you may find things somewhat changed. Dorothy may not be inclined to devote so much attention to my little country bud as in the old days."

"Oh," said Beatrice with enthusiasm, "I am convinced Dorothy will never change toward me. She's not that kind. When do we start?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oh, how shall I ever be able to get ready! I must be off to look after things. I hope I shan't appear before the Court and Dorothy quite like a dowdy!" And she pirouetted out of the room.

"Forgive her, gentlemen," said the Colonel indulgently, "she's only a child yet, you know. But, tell me what you think of this news I bring."

"Think!" replied the Professor; "what are we to think. It's impossible to imagine what we can be needed for — except, perhaps, as curiosities. I'm quite unfamiliar with the atmosphere of a Court and I think I may truthfully say that my friend Kearns is equally so. I don't know whether we should go."

"And I think I may truthfully say," declared Kearns, with a laugh, "that I have had an extensive experience with courts, though not of this precise character. Still, like the Professor, I am in doubt as to whether we ought to go. I've no particular liking for figuring as a curiosity."

"It would never do to refuse the royal command," said the Colonel. "Oh, by the way, there is some-

thing I had nearly forgotten. His Majesty has especially inquired as to the health of Mr. Kearns and will receive him in special audience immediately after his arrival at the Court."

"Well, well," exclaimed the Professor with light sarcasm, "let me congratulate you, my friend. You seem to be basking in the sunshine of royal favor."

But Kearns sat with bent brows, apparently in deep thought. A moment later he sprang lightly to his feet.

"Yes," he exclaimed with determination, "we'll go. I've been there before, you know."

"Where?" asked the Professor. "To the Court?"

"No," answered Kearns grimly, "not to the Court, but I've had experiences of this kind before. In the old days there were lots of times when the rich and the grand solicitously inquired as to the health of Mr. Thomas Kearns and were graciously pleased — it used to be 'exceedingly pleased' or 'eagerly anxious' in those days — to receive him in special audience. My experience tells me that when the rich and the great and the mighty are suddenly seized with a vivid interest in my health, joined to an anxiety to see me in special audience, it is safe to gamble there are special reasons therefor. In the classic language of my day: 'There is something doing'— some cash, or jewels, or maybe a lady gone astray and Thomas Kearns is needed to fix the difficulty, or solve the puzzle."

"You think," said the Professor, "that——"

"That there is some trouble at Court, or some danger which threatens the King upon his throne," said Kearns with conviction.

"I shall not be astonished if you were right," said General Mainwarren slowly.

The rest of the day was spent in preparations for the departure. Not least amongst these preparations was the selection for the Professor and Kearns, of a wardrobe which would modernize them in dress, at least. Some further instruction as to the changes which had taken place and as to the methods and manners of the Court were also given, with General Mainwarren and the Colonel as instructors. Interspersed with matters of Court etiquette, they learned the details of the great war recently so successfully closed between Russia and the Allies — the United States and Great Britain — in which, after many fierce struggles and an invasion resembling in many details that of the great Napoleon, the power of the fierce, barbaric Colossus of the North had finally been crushed.

At dinner that evening, Beatrice, full of life and spirits, was in joyous anticipation of the journey before them. Her prattle kept the party in merry mood, all except General Mainwarren, who seemed somewhat thoughtful and preoccupied.

"We will enjoy our coffee and cigars in the music room," said the Colonel to the Professor and Kearns, when dinner was over. "You shall indulge in a treat that was unattainable in your times."

He led the way to a spacious apartment adjoining the library — an apartment from walls of which protruded a number of giant-like trumpets.

"There," said the Colonel, pointing to two of the larger instruments, "we have direct connection with the Haymarket Theatre, in London, and also with the Covent Garden Theatre. Those other two instruments connect with two opera houses in Paris. I cannot treat you to English, or to French opera. Owing to the difference in time, neither of these cities is in action at its theatres at this moment. I can, how-

ever, let you hear some of the leading attractions in New York."

"You mean to say," exclaimed the Professor with rapt interest, "that you are practically in telephonic communication with the principal cities of the world?"

"Hardly that," answered the Colonel modestly, "since my music room is not large enough to permit of it, but it could be done. As it is, I am in touch with London, Paris, and several of the principal cities in this country. Now, listen to this. I am going to connect with the Folly Theatre, in New York. They have a revival on there of an old operetta; quite a favorite, I believe, in your time."

"What is its name?" asked Kearns.

"Dolly Varden," replied the Colonel effusively; "Dolly Varden, the title rôle of which, if I recall aright, was created by that charming *artiste* of your day, Glaser — the glorious Glaser, whose name has come down to us as the queen of comedy of the Western world."

As the Colonel finished speaking, he turned a rubber-covered knob in the wall beside one of the instruments and instantly there floated through the room the strains of "The Lay of the Jay," from Edwards' captivating operetta. Sweetly and clearly music and words floated into the room:

"Once there was a jay-bird; a rather ancient jay-bird,
Who lived on the top of a tree."

As the song ended, Kearns and the Professor were visibly affected.

The minutes passed. Still they listened, entranced, until the close of the opera. Then came the sounds of a moving multitude, joined to the playing of the band.

"The audience is leaving," remarked the Profes-

sor regretfully, "and the orchestra is playing the air 'My Country 'Tis of Thee.' Thank God! You have, at least, retained that old, familiar song."

"You mistake!" said General Mainwarren solemnly. "It is no longer known by that name."

"What, then?" gasped the Professor.

"God Save our Gracious King!" said the General.

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERY OF THE PALACE.

The antechamber of the King, in the great Summer Palace on the hill, was crowded with officers of the Army and Navy, financiers and statesmen, diplomats and courtiers. The officers and the diplomats wore the uniforms of their respective services. The rest were clad in court costume, consisting of knee breeches and tunic, strongly suggesting the court dress of the times of Louis XVI. It is said that fashions, like history, repeat themselves and here was a reversion to the models of the gay French court in the days of the Bourbons. With the splendor of color and the glittering crosses and orders upon the breasts of the men, the scene was a brilliant one.

A gorgeously attired attendant stood at the door leading into the inner audience chamber. At intervals someone who had been received in audience would pass out and the attendant, in a loud voice, would call a name and the favored one would pass to the audience chamber.

"General Mainwarren!" called the attendant, presently, and the General, leaving the side of Colonel Cuming, advanced and passed in.

The audience accorded the General was not prolonged. In a short time he returned to the antechamber. There was a slight flush upon his face and his mouth was set in a determined line.

"How did matters pass off?" inquired the Colonel anxiously.

"Nothing decisive," replied General Mainwarren. "I am commanded to remain at Court pending further discussion. I had, though, a rather sharp passage of arms with Milord Ashley."

"Colonel Sir Maynard Cuming and party!" the attendant at that moment announced; and the Colonel, followed by the Professor and Kearns, entered the audience chamber.

The King was seated in a massive chair of magnificently carved oak, beside a portentous-looking table, littered with documents of state and other papers tied together with pink or blue silk ribbon. As he sat there, he presented the appearance of a man slightly above the middle height, slight of figure and thin of face, with keen, bright blue eyes, a long and luxuriant brown moustache and short, closely clipped, lighter-brown beard. The face, deeply marked with lines of thought and care, showed keen perception and sharp intuition. His movements were quick and nervous. There was one noticeable mannerism. The face had a peculiar aptitude for breaking into a smile which at its moment of origin was bright and cheery and, so lasting for a moment, suddenly died away into a fixed, cold stare. It was as a gleam of sunshine, followed by frost. He was garbed in the dress of the Court and upon his breast glittered a single order.

Beside and slightly behind him stood Lord Cyril Ashley, Vice-Chancellor of the Empire and Master of the Imperial Household. Lord Ashley was a well-preserved man of middle age; tall, handsome, and of soldierly bearing. The face, with its dark eyes, strongly marked brows and sweeping black moustache, was that of a man of stern will and strong determination. He was dressed in the dashing uniform of a Captain of the Guards.

Colonel Cuming advanced, bowing low before the

King, followed by his two companions. The Colonel was received by His Majesty with marked cordiality and at the royal invitation he presented the Professor and Kearns. As the latter was presented, the King turned upon him a sharp, scrutinizing glance.

His Majesty listened to the story of the resurrection of the two wayfarers from the past with an air of marked interest and after asking a number of questions signified that the interview was at an end. But it was the royal wish that Mr. Thomas Kearns should remain in special audience.

Colonel Cuming and the Professor accordingly backed out of the royal presence, leaving Kearns somewhat astonished and perplexed amid his novel surroundings.

"History records, Mr. Kearns," said the King, "that you were the most skilful and the most successful Chief of Secret Service this country has ever known. Is not that correct, Milord?" he asked, turning to Lord Ashley.

"It is so recorded, Sire," answered the Vice-Chancellor. "Our historians and our writers of fiction have alike presented to us Mr. Kearns as the great Chief of Secret Service of the Western world — the equal of Vidocq, or of Fouché, if not their superior."

"Just so," said the King; "and it is precisely a Fouché that we need at our court at the present time. Your old-time cunning is, doubtless, still with you?"

Kearns bowed somewhat awkwardly.

"I do not know, Sire," he answered simply.

He had heard both Colonel Cuming and Lord Ashley address the King as "Sire," and he thought it best to follow this form.

"How so—you do not know?" inquired the King.

"Well, Sire," replied Kearns, "as such talents

as I once had have not had a chance of being exercised during seventy-five years, they may have become somewhat rusty. Besides, your writers have, perhaps, taken liberties and have exaggerated somewhat."

"Ah," exclaimed the King, his face breaking into a pleasant smile; "the modesty of genius!" The smile faded suddenly into that peculiar frosty stare, and he continued: "We have, however, less need for modesty than for action. Do you feel your abilities impaired?"

"Not in the least, Sire," came the quick answer. "I feel as well as ever I did in my life."

"Why, then," retorted the King, "should you question your ability? Is it not true that upon one occasion you detected the writer of certain letters from among a whole cityful of people?"

"I had so many cases in my time, Sire," answered Kearns, with some hesitancy, "that I scarcely recollect the particular case you seem to have in mind. My memory has grown a little faint after this lapse of time. If you could give me a few details as to the circumstances ——"

"The circumstances," exclaimed the King, "were, as we remember them, as follows: An ancestor of one of our most distinguished subjects — Baron Gold — had been the recipient of a number of letters, written by some unknown writer, threatening him with assassination. He sent to you for aid in his peril and, it is recorded, within forty-eight hours, by a most ingenious plan, you had detected and apprehended the malefactor. Is this true?"

Kearns with difficulty restrained himself from laughing outright. Well he remembered the case now and the shrewd face of the ancestor of the distinguished Baron Gold rose with startling vividness before his mental vision.

"Quite true, Sire," he answered gravely; "but the case was a rather simple one."

"A rather simple one! We would have you tell us how you accomplished these things."

"In this way, Sire," replied Kearns. "As you have said, our friend — that is, I should say, the — ah — distinguished ancestor of the distinguished Baron Gold had been in receipt of letters threatening him with death, unless he paid a certain money tribute. He was a man of wealth — of very great wealth — but he had a constitutional aversion to parting with it. Almost equally he disliked the possibility of sudden death."

Again the King smiled his peculiar smile of mingled sunshine and frost.

"How the characteristics of the ancestor are carried down through the generations!" he remarked to Lord Ashley.

The latter smiled and bowed a respectful acquiescence.

"Proceed!" said the King.

"Brought face to face with these two almost equally disagreeable alternatives," continued Kearns, "he sent for me. Investigation quickly showed me that all the letters had been mailed within a certain radius in the city. I caused such action to be taken by the ancestor of Baron Gold as was likely to lead to an early reply from the unknown letter writer. Then I proceeded to throw out my net. I caused every drop box in the post offices and every pillar box in the streets within the suspected district to be watched by two persons — the one an employe of the Post Office, the other one of my men. The moment a letter was dropped, the Post Office employe would proceed to examine the address on such letter. If it was not addressed to the threatened person, a rubber

band was twisted over the envelope to distinguish it from anything dropped later. In this way the Post Office man was readily enabled to distinguish all the examined letters from the latest one dropped.

"This method," pursued Kearns, "was continued systematically for a day and a night without yielding any result. On the afternoon of the second day, however, a man approached a letter box in one of the side streets, deposited a letter and hastily walked away. The Post Office employe stepped to the box, opened it as usual and — up went his hand above his head. This was the agreed signal. In an instant my man was after the depositor of the letter and had him in custody. He was brought before me and the letter, opened in his presence by — ah — the ancestor of Baron Gold, contained conclusive proof of his guilt. The man turned out to be a monomaniac, hence his peculiar cunning and the difficulty experienced in catching him in any of the ordinary traps usually laid in such cases. But, you see, after all, the case was simple enough."

"It was highly ingenious," decided the King. "It is recorded also that out of a band of men you picked a murderer by an examination of the hands of these men. Is this so?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Kearns; "that's quite correct. The case was a more difficult one. The circumstances were somewhat repellant."

"Nevertheless, we would learn them," said the King.

"A woman had been murdered by one of that species of fiends, half criminal, half madman, who spring up from time to time. The murderer in this case, after killing his victim, had torn away certain portions of the body. In the course of his devilish work, he had cut into and mutilated a portion of the

intestines. My investigations discovered that a short time before the murder the woman had eaten a certain kind of food. From other circumstances learned by me I was convinced that one of a certain number of men had slain her. I had these men brought before me and caused the lodgments under their fingernails to be carefully scraped and preserved in separate packages. A scientific examination of the contents of one package disclosed the presence of human blood corpuscles, together with certain minute particles, the chemical resultants of that particular food of which the woman had partaken shortly before her death. In a word, I had the murderer."

"Skilful, decidedly skilful," commented the King. "It is precisely for such skill that we have urgent need at the present time."

"In what direction, Sire?"

"Here — at our Court. We have decided to retain you in our service and we count upon your fidelity and the exercise of your uttermost skill."

Kearns bowed. The ancestor of the distinguished Baron Gold and the numerous other great men who had been wont to invoke his services in the olden time had adopted a tone of supplication rather than of patronage. However, he accepted the change as part and parcel of the new order of things and Mr. Thomas Kearns was a man to adapt himself to any and all existing circumstances.

"Listen, then," said the King. "For some time past our peace has been disturbed — nay, the safety of our very person threatened — from some unknown source which all the energy of our Secret Service has been unable to discover. We look to you to discover that source — to run to earth these arch-enemies of our peace and safety."

"Will you furnish me with further details, Sire?"

"It was some months ago," continued the King, "when we awoke one morning to find a paper on the table beside our bed. It is needless to recount what this paper contained. Suffice that it held demands and threats. You will realize the importance of this happening, for he who had the power to deposit that paper had also the power to have inflicted more material injury."

Kearns bowed his assent.

"Our sleeping apartment," resumed the King, "is some fifty feet from the ground. There are sentinels on the roof of the palace and in the grounds below. The sentinels were trebled and other precautions taken and yet again this occurrence came to pass."

"Another document," questioned Kearns, "of the same character, deposited under the same circumstances?"

"Precisely," said the King, and a perceptible shiver passed over him; "but yet stranger things were to happen. Extraordinary precautions were now taken. The surroundings of the room were filled with sentinels, men were posted in the corridors, an officer of the guard stationed in the antechamber. At our side slept our faithful mastiff, Victor — a noble brute, of great sagacity and strength. The doors leading into our apartment were sealed from the inside by our own hand, so that no movement of these doors could be made without disturbing these seals. Were these not precautions enough?"

"The value of a precaution is best tested by its efficacy, Sire," replied Kearns cautiously.

"Then," exclaimed the King, "these precautions were without value, for one night, some four weeks ago, there was another visitation."

"Indeed, Sire?"

"Our repose had lasted some two hours when we were sharply awakened by the furious barking of the dog, followed by his savage growls. His head was bent to the ground and he savagely clutched something between his teeth. Nothing in the apartment was disturbed; nothing beyond the actions of the animal was to be noted; the seals on the doors were undisturbed. And yet — between the teeth of the dog was a document, folded and tied together. It contained the same demands, repeated the same threats. With an apartment fifty feet above the ground, armed sentinels filling every avenue, the doors fastened by seals, how did it get there — how did it get there!" cried the King with agitation.

"The possibility of a trap door in floor or ceiling, or of a secret entrance of any kind to the chamber is not to be entertained, of course?" asked Kearns.

"Not for a moment!" exclaimed the King. "You may pass that by as not needing further consideration. Eh, Milord Ashley?"

"Oh, undoubtedly!" answered the Master of the Household. "The apartment has been thoroughly examined from every side. Any secret means of ingress through floor, walls or ceiling is absolutely impossible."

"But there are chimneys — windows?"

"Chimneys, no," replied Lord Ashley. "We warm to-day by electricity and there isn't a chimney in the whole palace. As to windows, yes; there are four."

"Were they shuttered, or screened?"

"Screened?" exclaimed Lord Ashley with bewilderment. "How do you mean — screened?"

"Why," answered Kearns, equally astonished at this observation, "I mean, of course, screened against flies — mosquitoes."

"Flies — mosquitoes!" exclaimed the King and Lord Ashley in the same breath. Both gave a hearty guffaw.

Kearns was visibly nettled. This was, indeed, different from the old days. He was certainly not accustomed to being laughed at. The last time this had occurred was when he had been outwitted upon one occasion by Converse, the so-called King of Counterfeiters — an experienced, clever and wily old wrongdoer. Kearns never forgave that laugh, and it was not long until Converse, in spite of his great ability, fell into an especially clever net set by Kearns. Incidentally, he paid the penalty of that laugh with a twenty years' sentence. It was not a healthy occupation to laugh at Mr. Kearns in those days.

Lord Ashley noticed Kearns' very evident chagrin.

"No, no," he hastened to explain; "thanks to our modern scientists we have no flies or — ah — mosquitoes in these days. They are unknown to-day except as curiosities in the collection of some scientist, or under the glass cases in our museums. It is quite natural," he added, with a conciliatory wave of the hand, "that you should have — ah — overlooked this fact."

But Mr. Kearns' chagrin was not to be so easily dissipated.

"Conditions have doubtless changed," he said somewhat testily, "and I see nothing to be gained by any desultory examination of the facts. It will be necessary for me to make a personal investigation of the surroundings themselves."

"Every facility shall be accorded you," said the King. "Quarters shall be assigned you in the palace. Do you think," he inquired anxiously, "that you will succeed?"

"I'm not accustomed to failure, Sire," answered Kearns almost curtly.

"Succeed, then," exclaimed the King, "and the reward which shall be yours shall be such as to emphasize the distinction between the liberality of a Court and the proverbial ingratitude of Republics."

Kearns bowed.

"I can undertake to prosecute this investigation successfully," he said, "under one condition only."

"It is?" asked the King.

"I've been accustomed, Sire," said Kearns with dignity, "to pursue certain methods peculiarly my own. Those methods I must continue if I am to be successful. You've doubtless had people at work on this case. They must be called off. In a word, I must not be interfered with. I must have sole and entire charge."

"But suppose you should need assistance?"

"Then I'll ask for it. Also, I reserve the right to select my assistants."

Both the King and Lord Ashley seemed to hesitate. At last the King spoke.

"Those so far employed have failed," he said. "It shall be as you ask."

"Then, Sire," said Kearns, "I've but one other request to make."

"Name it," said the King.

"That my companion, Professor Dean, be permitted to remain."

"A most natural desire," exclaimed the King. "Our Master of the Household will issue such orders as will insure every facility to you and every comfort to you both. You will attend the Court ball to-night; it will afford you opportunities of observation."

His Majesty signified that the audience was at an end and Mr. Kearns withdrew.

"Professor," said Kearns, after they had been conducted to the quarters assigned them in the palace, "didn't I predict that there were special reasons why we should be welcomed here? With our services in demand and with the freedom of the Imperial Palace, we don't seem to be doing so badly for wayfarers in a strange land."

"That's true," said the Professor. "There is some danger, then, threatening the King?"

"Yes."

"Serious?"

"From what I can judge of the case thus far," said Mr. Kearns thoughtfully, "I should say yes! Serious — *quite serious!*"

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT COURT BALL

"I will point out some of the notables," said General Mainwarren to the Professor and Kearns; "they will no doubt interest you, especially such as are descendants of those known to you in your time."

The scene was the great Court ball, held in the magnificent *salons* of the Summer Palace, ablaze with light and beauty. The sumptuous decorations, the masses of flowers, the resplendent uniforms, the glittering crosses and orders upon the breasts of many of the men, the Court dresses, the blaze of jewels — composed a scene of the utmost brilliancy and splendor.

And the women! American women have ever been famed for their grace, their ineffable *chic* and their beauty, and certainly the race, as viewed from this ball-room floor, seemed by no means to have declined. Kearns, who had been a regular attendant at the opera in the old days, considered himself quite a judge of feminine loveliness. He remembered to have heard it urged by captious foreigners that the American woman's weakest points were her walk and her voice. These defects seemed to have received attention, for in the noble bearing of the heads of these women, the graceful sweep of their walk, their sweet vocal intonations, there was no ground left for the most captious critic to stand upon. Decidedly, thought Kearns, both the walk and the voice had been

cultivated to perfection under the *regime* of royalty.

"The notables," he said in answer to General Mainwarren's words. "Ah, yes! By the way," he added with sudden animation, "could you point out to me the — the — distinguished Baron Gold."

"Baron Gold — Baron Gold," repeated General Mainwarren, "let me see if I can discover him for you."

He glanced about the ball-room.

"There he is!" he exclaimed, after a brief search.

Kearns and the Professor followed the direction of the General's glance and saw an old man, with gray eyes, sunken cheeks and high forehead, engaged in conversation with a white-moustached gentleman, in the uniform of the diplomatic corps, who sat at his side.

"So that is Baron Gold?" said Kearns.

"Yes," answered General Mainwarren, "that is Baron Gold, one of the great Trust magnates and at one time Chancellor of the Exchequer. His country seat is Gorgan Court and his arms are an eagle with beak elevated and talons outspread, and the motto: 'I dare and I do.' That's correct, I believe, Colonel?"

"Quite," answered Colonel Cuming.

"'I dare and I do,' eh?" said Kearns reflectively. "Very appropriate!"

"Ah," exclaimed General Mainwarren, "see the party passing opposite to us. He with the white hair, slightly in advance of the rest, with the Star of the Empire upon his breast, is His Grace, the Duke of Marquanna, Chancellor of the Realm, often styled the American 'Warwick,' since he lent such powerful hand in the establishment and formation of the Empire. He takes his title from his beautiful country seat, bearing the family name of Marquanna. His

arms are a gerfalcon, rising over an argent field, with the motto: 'Gold is tried by Fire, but Men are tried by Gold.'"

"An excellent motto, too!" commented Kearns. "'Men are tried by gold!' eh? Well; the handsome and able ancestor of this particular Duke could certainly have left behind some striking illustrations of that fact had he been pleased to do so."

"The Duke," continued General Mainwarren, "is growing somewhat old and infirm and, while he yields not one jot of his power and authority, certain of the more arduous routine duties of his office of Chancellor he delegates to the Vice-Chancellor, Lord Ashley, who is there on his left hand. You are already acquainted with him."

"What manner of man is Lord Ashley?" questioned Kearns. "He interests me."

"Lord Ashley, Vice-Chancellor and Master of the Imperial Household," replied General Mainwarren, "is a soldier who earned a reputation for daring and dash during the early part of the late war with Russia. He was severely wounded at the battle of Pedrofski and retired during the rest of the campaign. His actual military rank is Captain of the Imperial Guards — a position which carries with it the brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel."

"Who are these Guards?" asked Kearns.

"They are His Majesty's body-guard, and consist of three regiments," said the General. "They are attached to the different imperial palaces. The men are all picked for their splendid physique, and the uniforms are magnificent."

"So I see," assented Kearns, his eyes still following the Duke of Marquanna's party. "And who are the four persons behind the Duke?"

"The taller one of the first two," answered Gen-

eral Mainwarren, "is the Earl of Vandergilt, one of the heads of the great Transportation Trust, and the smaller, stouter man at his side, with the white side whiskers, the rubicund countenance and nose like the beak of the eagle is Sir Mancey Carew, a great legal light, raconteur, and right-hand man of the Earl. See how his eyes twinkle and his lips purse; he is about to tell a story!"

"And the other two?"

"The nearest one to us," answered General Mainwarren, "is Sir Keypoint Horgan; the person at his side I do not know. Do you, Colonel?"

"Yes," replied Colonel Cuming. "He's a comparative new-comer at the Court. He's an Englishman, with important financial interests here. Failing to attain distinction in his native land, it is said, he decided to become a naturalized American subject. The King has recently created him a Baronet and he now rejoices in the title of Sir Walder-Asta."

"There seem to be many notables present," remarked Kearns.

"Yes," replied General Mainwarren. "The nobility from all parts of the land are here. See the group over there to our right. There is Sir Marlington Blackhouse, the famous cotillon leader, and Lady Terry Montbel and Lady Olive Harrifellow, each noted as a beauty and a sportswoman; Sir Hatmeadow-Hatmeadow Nailer, Lady Phillippe Shield and Lady Dotter Dalmer, all three from the middle country; Sir Charles De Olde, from the West, and Lady Jacques Jardinier, from the city which, I believe, you were wont to term the 'Athens of America.'"

Further conversation was temporarily interrupted by a stir, a buzz and a general rising as the King and Queen, accompanied by their suites, made their en-

trance and crossed the floor to a raised dais at the further end of the ball-room where two magnificently draped throne chairs were reserved for them. The band burst forth with the National Anthem, once known as "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," now styled "God Save the King." The King and Queen took their seats and the ball was resumed.

In appearance the Queen was tall and slight of figure almost to the point of girlishness, with pale, regular features and well-poised head. The face reflected an amiable disposition, joined to a certain pride and determination, but it suggested more of sorrow and resignation than of contentment and happiness. As she sat under the full light of the brilliant ball-room, her regal jewels a-glitter, her noble profile sharply outlined, she looked graceful, beautiful, every inch a queen, yet unhappy.

The Professor and Kearns gazed upon her with mingled admiration and interest.

"The Queen," whispered the latter to General Mainwarren; "what of her?"

"Is she not gracious and beautiful!" answered the General in lowered tones. "Who is she? She was, before her marriage to the King, an Archduchess of Austria — the youngest daughter of the Austrian monarch."

"She is popular and happy?"

"Popular, yes — with her sweet and gracious ways she has crept into the hearts of the people and for that reason is regarded by many as one of the strongest bulwarks of the throne. But happy; alas, no!"

"And why not?"

"Never did any mediæval monarch cling more strongly to the maxim that 'The King can do no wrong,' or more fully demand the liberties and im-

munities claimed by kingcraft, than this King who sits upon the American throne. His profligacy and licentiousness, his all too many and too flagrant intrigues, have deeply shocked the Queen, who is naturally possessed of strong religious and moral sentiments. There is an estrangement of long standing between them. They are together only when some public function demands and she maintains a surrounding of her own, entirely apart from the King's, devoting her attention largely to the education of the two young princes. Ah, there is little Beatrice!"

All looked as General Mainwarren spoke and saw approaching in their direction Beatrice Cuming in company with four other ladies. The members of the party seated themselves a slight distance away.

"Who is that beautiful girl taking her place beside your daughter?" asked the Professor of Colonel Cuming.

"Ah!" exclaimed Kearns explosively; "so the man of science has an eye for feminine beauty, eh! Look out, Professor, that in spite of your hundred odd years, you don't get enmeshed. Let me see this beauty. Whew! But the man is right. Beautiful! Why, she's a dream — a lovely dream! What eyes — what teeth!"

"Who is she?" repeated the Professor.

"That," answered Colonel Cuming, "is the lady to whom you heard Beatrice refer — Miss Dorothy Brandon, a distant cousin of Beatrice and one of the maids of honor to Her Majesty, the Queen."

"And are the other three ladies also maids of honor?" asked Kearns, with a sly glance at General Mainwarren.

"No," answered the General, smiling; "not exactly maids of honor, although each holds position

at the Court. The tall brunette, with the bold dark eyes, and the tiara of diamonds flashing above her dark hair, is the Countess Brooke, one of the most handsome women and, I might perhaps add, credited with being one of the most dangerous intrigantes of the Court. She has a clever and a dangerous tongue and is sometimes styled 'the Babbling Brooke,' after a certain famous beauty of one of the old-time English Courts, whom this lady in many respects strongly resembles. You see, history repeats itself."

"And the other two ladies?"

"The shorter brunette, with the heavy dark brows, the brilliant red lips and the big brown eyes is the Baroness Maquehaye, a great leader of fashion and a wonderful entertainer. Her garden party of last Spring is still talked about. The tall, rather plump blonde lady, on the other side of the Countess, is Lady Hadley-Barton, famed for her social ambitions. Ah, I see there is going to be an addition to the party."

As the General spoke two army officers, each clad in the dashing uniform of the Imperial Guard, advanced and greeted the ladies. One of them was a man of magnificent physique, tall, and lithe, with clear, flashing blue eyes and a sweeping blond moustache; the other was shorter, dark, with kindly brown eyes and of sinewy, well-knit figure.

"A pair of remarkably clean-cut, fine-looking men," commented Kearns, "although I have no doubt that uniform helps matters along a good deal. Who are they?"

"You see in them," answered General Mainwarren, "two of the bravest and most dashing young officers of the army. Both of them performed deeds of daring in the late war with Russia which made

their names ring throughout the country and made them the objects of the usual popular idolatry which the American people have ever been wont to lavish, for a short time at least, upon their heroes. See that peculiar-shaped star which each wears among the decorations on his breast. It's the Star of Columbia, the most coveted decoration of all the many decorations which this Court boasts. It's the decoration which is conferred only for special valor in actual face of the enemy. Both these men wear it and both have earned it. They've been recently ordered to Court to join the Imperial Guard. Here they're show-pieces. Shame to it that gallant soldiers should not be put to better uses! The taller of the two is Captain Stanley Mortimer; the other, Captain Ralph Swords."

The two officers talked for some time in lively strain with the ladies of the party, the brunt of the conversation being borne by the Countess Brooke, who leveled several witching glances at the tall guardsman. Then Captain Mortimer offered his arm to Dorothy and, followed by Captain Swords escorting Beatrice, he led the way to the dancing-floor. From the orchestra came the opening strains of a waltz.

Although the dancers were already taking their positions upon the floor, Beatrice insisted upon stopping as they passed her father's party and, following her usual impetuous methods, hurried general presentations ensued. Miss Brandon smiled upon the Professor and murmured a few pleasant words; and Captain Mortimer extended a frank, soldierly invitation to Kearns to visit him at his quarters next day. Then the two couples passed on to mingle a moment later in the maze of waltzers.

More bewitching grew the sensuous strains of the waltz, faster and faster flew the steps of the dancers,

as Captain Stanley Mortimer, holding Dorothy lightly clasped, circled the floor. He had caught her step to a nicety and they whirled in perfect rhythmic unison. Her breath was upon his cheek, a loosened strand of her hair touched his lips, her form nestled more closely in his arms. As the last bars of the music died away, her eyes met his in one fleeting, upward glance — half coy, half enraptured — and he slowly bent his head in a motion that was almost a caress.

But as they danced, a pair of black eyes, flashing under heavy dark brows, had watched with unfriendly glances, and the dainty lace handkerchief between the jeweled fingers of the Countess Brooke was defaced by two jagged rents.

Captain Mortimer led Dorothy back to her seat.

"The fourth waltz is to be mine?" he murmured.

"As you will," she whispered back.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE GARDENS OF THE KING.

"They belonged to the Tenth Dragoons before being transferred to the Imperial Guard?" asked the Baroness Maquehaye.

"Yes," replied the Countess Brooke, "both Captain Mortimer and Captain Swords belonged to the Tenth and the Regiment was quartered at the Summer Palace at Oldport. However, Lady Hadley-Barton can tell us more about that, as she spent the Summer at Oldport. I was there only toward the close."

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Lady Hadley-Barton effusively, "and a delightful season we had, too! The officers of the Tenth were simply too lovely. It was one succession of receptions and balls and excursions and coaching parties. Never had Oldport known such a gay season as while the 'Fighting Tenth' was there. They entertained us day and night. Really, they took the place by storm and we surrendered ourselves to them unconditionally."

"Indeed?" replied the Countess Brooke, with the suspicion of a sneer in the slightly upraised eyebrow and curve of the lip.

"Yes," continued Lady Hadley-Barton, "never was there a regiment — not even the Imperial Guard — which contained so many handsome, dashing men and such excellent entertainers. As I say, they captured us completely. Of course, you will take me figuratively."

"There was some little scandal, though, toward the close of the season, if I remember rightly," commented Countess Brooke.

"Scandal?" questioned Baroness Maquehaye.

"Yes," replied Countess Brooke, "in connection with the high gaming in the mess-room of the Tenth. Several young men, it's said, were completely ruined."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Lady Hadley-Barton, "it's true there was some gossip, but what of it? One expects a little scandalizing whenever a company of gay soldiers is on the ground. Of course, you will take me figuratively."

"It doesn't seem so astonishing to me," remarked Baroness Maquehaye, "that soldiers, especially after a long and arduous campaign, should go in for heavy gaming. The risks and chances of play must replace with them to some extent the risks and chances of war. What particular form of play did they indulge in?"

"Baccarat," answered Countess Brooke, "and the bids for the bank, I understand, used to run up into thousands of crowns. There was a bank bid in one night under certain peculiar circumstances — circumstances which will, no doubt, be long remembered by the successful bidder, Captain Mortimer."

At the mention of the name, Dorothy, who had been engaged in conversation with Beatrice, slightly turned her head. Every word that followed, in the distinct, crisp tones of the Countess, fell clearly upon her listening ear.

"Do tell us the story," exclaimed Baroness Maquehaye. "It sounds as if it were likely to be interesting."

"Quite a romance, although, perhaps, slightly sordid," continued the Countess Brooke carelessly.

"Well, it seems that on a particular night the play was very heavy — unusually heavy even for the mess-room of the Tenth. Captain Mortimer had been a fairly good winner during the early part of the season, but later encountered a long spell of ill-luck, which often sets in with those who woo the fickle goddess of chance. He had been losing heavily and in the strong play of that night thought he saw a chance to recoup. A bank was put up and under spirited bidding went into the thousands."

Here the Countess paused, with the dramatic effect of a good *raconteuse*.

"Your story is quite interesting," exclaimed Baroness Maquehaye. "Do go on."

"Oh, yes; do," added Lady Hadley-Barton, "I love to hear of the wicked doings of those soldiers. In fact, as I told Major Packenham, of the Tenth, the wickeder the soldier the more I seem to worship him."

"I trust he took you — figuratively," remarked the Countess.

"Quite so; quite so," Lady Hadley-Barton hastened to respond.

"Pray proceed," urged Baroness Maquehaye.

"Well," continued the Countess Brooke, "the bank which had been bid up into the thousands was finally awarded to the highest bidder — Captain Stanley Mortimer."

Dorothy Brandon stirred slightly in her seat and her pink-and-white ear veered slightly around in the direction of the narrator.

"The Captain threw down on the table the sum representing the capital of the bank and took his seat in the banker's chair."

Again the Countess paused, as if seeking to recall the full details of her story.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Baroness Maquehaye, "and then ——?"

"I can imagine the scene," declared Lady Hadley-Barton impulsively; "the green table, the stacks of money, the high players. How I wish I had been there. How much we women miss! I have so often wished I wore trousers. Of course, you will take me figuratively."

"Captain Mortimer took his seat in the banker's chair," resumed the Countess, "and as he did so he looked upon those about him. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'luck has been to me lately a sorry jade. Let's see if she will now mend her ways. If she doesn't and you succeed in breaking this bank, there's nothing left to me but to surrender the freedom and the joys of happy bachelorhood, accept the offer which I have of a command in the Imperial Guard, go to Court and — marry an heiress. Now, gentlemen, proceed and do your worst.'"

"How delightfully dramatic," exclaimed Lady Hadley-Barton.

"Well, and what happened next?" eagerly inquired Baroness Maquehaye.

"Fortune favored the gallant Captain at one time and it looked as if he might escape the dire fate of having to sell his prized liberty to the God of Mammon, as represented in the person of an heiress. But the luck veered and set in heavily against the bank. The right tableau won steadily; but the left — the one nearest the banker's heart, you will observe — did the mischief. There came a heavy coup, both tableaux winning, and the bank was broken."

"Ah!" excalimed Baroness Maquehaye with tense interest.

"The poor Captain!" remarked Lady Hadley-Barton.

"Captain Mortimer showed not the least perturbation," resumed Countess Brooke. "He rose from the table, lighted a cigar and, turning to those about him, said: 'I congratulate you, gentlemen, but that settles it for me. Now for the Court and — the heiress!'"

"I call that an interesting story," exclaimed Lady Hadley-Barton. "Strange I hadn't heard it before."

"Interesting, perhaps, but decidedly mercenary," commented Baroness Maquehaye with some show of disdain.

"Mercenary!" echoed Countess Brooke, "surely you're severe. Call it *un mariage de convenance* — or of necessity, if you will — it sounds more pretty! Isn't the Captain a decidedly presentable man and one famed for his bravery in the war? Won't the heiress who buys him with her gold secure her money's worth?"

A little man — dapper and smiling — dressed in the uniform of the French diplomatic corps, the red ribbon of the *Legion d'Honeur* at his buttonhole, presented himself at that moment before Dorothy. To his profound bow and extended arm she returned a dazed stare. Her face was strangely strained and pale. The little man was fairly taken aback.

"You promised me zis dance, you know, Mees Brandon," he stammered. "I am quite sure I have not made mistake as to ze numbaire. I ——"

Mechanically she arose, accepted the proferred arm and went toward the dancing floor.

"You are not indisposed, I trust," he inquired solicitously.

"Count D'Arville," she exclaimed impulsively, with a pressure ever so slight upon his gold-laced sleeve, "I know how gallant are the gentlemen of

France and that you are *le plus galant des galants*. You'll do me a favor, won't you?"

The Count's face reddened in a pleasurable flush.

"Ah, *mademoiselle*," he exclaimed excitedly, and almost losing command of his limited stock of English, "if I shall do you a favor? It will give me pleasure, as you know, to lay down ze life for you. I await ze honor of your commands."

"Thank you, Count," said Dorothy simply, her blue eyes flashing upon him a grateful smile, "I knew you would. I want you to forego this dance. You won't mind, will you?"

A look of disappointment came into Count D'Arville's face.

"It is a great deprivation, *mademoiselle*, but I am your slave."

"Instead," continued Dorothy, "you will take me to the conservatory."

"Yes."

"And there you'll leave me alone — entirely alone — for a few moments, returning for me at the end of the dance.

"You are ill, *mademoiselle?*"

"No, no; I assure you."

"Is there nothing I can do?"

Another light pressure on the Count's resplendent sleeve.

"Remember, *monsieur le comte*," she said, "that he who would serve well must yield blindly. You wish to serve well?"

The speech was accompanied by another adroit smile, before which the Count retired utterly routed — horse, foot and dragoons.

"*Pardi! mademoiselle*," he answered with effusion, "to hear you is for me to obey. It shall be as you will."

He accordingly conducted her to the conservatory — an immense structure of great length and breadth, resembling more a miniature park than a place ordinarily designated under the name of conservatory. Here and there tropical trees and massive plants stretched their foliage in wide, overhanging branches; there were by-paths and niches and bowers in the winding gardens; and at intervals fountains, under whose limpid waters flashed golden fishes, gushed forth amid the violets and the roses. It was a dream of floral splendor — such opulence and magnificence as had never been dreamed even by luxurious Eastern potentates of the olden days. It was the Western world saying to the Eastern: "You bragged in the old days of your Oriental sumptuousness and luxury, but yours was only a poor affair, after all! See what we can do, with modern money and modern methods!"

Into this great garden of the King, Count D'Arville led Dorothy. He escorted her to a secluded spot under the branches of a Taribou tree and with numerous bows and protestations left her.

When, at the close of the dance a few minutes later, he returned to her side, she rewarded him with a gracious smile.

"You've been of great service to me, *monsieur le comte,*" she said. "Now, please take me back. I am engaged for the next waltz — the fourth, you know. Ah, I have one other service to ask of you!"

"It is, *mademoiselle?*"

"The dance after that — after the fourth waltz, I mean — I have promised to Lord Ashley. Will you kindly tell Lord Ashley that he will find me in the conservatory — at this spot?"

Count D'Arville bowed.

"I will bear your commands to Milord Ashley,"

he said, "but after zat — later on — may I not have my lost dance?"

A weary look came into her face.

"After that — after Lord Ashley — I'll dance no more to-night," she said. "But," she hastened to add, "I'll make it up to you. At the ball next week you shall have two."

Quite elated with this promise, the gallant Count reluctantly surrendered her to her partner for the fourth waltz, Captain Stanley Mortimer.

Again he held her in his arms, as he skilfully guided her amid the whirling dancers; again he felt her breath upon his cheek; again her upturned eyes met his — smiling, ecstatic, dreamy — and into their depths he looked with tenderness. He was vaguely conscious of her warm and yielding form pressed to his; of the rise and fall of her firm, white bosom and throat; of a strange, rare perfume, that seemed to exhale from her dress, from amid the glittering gold of her hair, intoxicating him.

His heart beating wildly, his whole being filling, thrilling, with a wild ecstasy of hope and of love, on and on they danced until the last bars of the waltz had been played out and the dance came to an end.

For a moment they stood silent. Then, with a murmured suggestion as to the warmth of the ball-room, he led her to the conservatory. Slowly they wandered along the winding paths until — unconsciously as it seemed — they reached a secluded seat under the outstretched branches of a wide-leafed Taribou tree.

For some moments they sat there — speechless, almost motionless. A great wave of emotion surged within him. Never in the wildest charges into the gray-coated Russian ranks, nor in the bloody night attack upon Varshava, nor when he had spiked the

great gun on the heights of Vladivik, had his heart beat so wildly. He longed to speak and yet a species of dread — a coward fear — overawed him.

With an effort, he drew himself together and turned to her. She raised her eyes to his. Then the pent-up words suddenly rushed to his lips and in a mad, wild torrent of eloquence and love he poured forth to her the hope of his soul.

With his first words her eyes sank and with drooped head she listened, without sign or movement, to the very end. Then, as with hope and doubt — doubt and hope — tearing at his heart, he waited one breathless moment, she slowly rose to her feet and turned her eyes full upon his face. He caught a light in them which brought him, staggering, to his feet. He faced her with straining eyes and features tense and rigid — as a man awaiting his death blow. As last she spoke:

"You certainly play the part well, Captain Mortimer — so well one might almost believe it true. Really, I congratulate you."

"Play — a part! What can you mean?"

"That the Tenth has indeed lost in Captain Mortimer a great player, alike in amateur theatricals and at — baccarat."

A man appeared, the light flashing from the decorations upon his breast, as he came slowly along the garden path.

"What do you mean?" he repeated blankly. "I — do — not — understand."

"Indeed? Ah! here comes Lord Ashley. Pray excuse me. My next dance is his."

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT ALARM.

"A crown for your thoughts, Professor!" said General Mainwarren to Professor Dean, as the latter sat thoughtfully watching the dancers.

The Professor aroused himself with a slight start.

"Oh, I was allowing my thoughts to drift idly in many currents," he answered.

"For instance, if it is not impertinent to inquire?"

"Well, I was marveling at the beauty, the luxury and the splendor of all this, and thinking what it must cost to keep up. The thought occurred to me that the cost of this one ball" — and the Professor shot a sharp glance at General Mainwarren — "would probably be sufficient to keep warm all the poor people in your district who are likely to suffer, according to what you told us, for coal this Winter, in addition to supplying every poor child with a Christmas box."

"A Christmas box!" exclaimed General Mainwarren. "What a quaint reminiscence wafted to us from the past!"

"How do you mean — 'a quaint reminiscence'?"

"Why, my dear Professor, Christmas boxes are with us as much a thing of the past as the curfew bell, knights in armor, or any of the other customs of mediæval times."

"How came this kindly practice to be abolished?" asked the Professor blankly.

"Kindly!" repeated General Mainwarren. "I can't agree with you. The custom was discontinued long ago by the wealthier classes and the rest of the people gradually followed. It was one of the few good acts which the rich have done for the poor; one of the many features in which our social organization of to-day excels yours."

"But what leads you to this view?"

"Why," explained General Mainwarren, "your giving of Christmas presents was nothing less than the refinement of cruelty upon a colossal scale. Think of the tens of thousands of heart yearnings and of heart aches which must have been caused in your day owing to this custom. It was all very nice for the well-to-do, but think of the tens of thousands who felt forced to give what they couldn't afford; of those who wished to give but could not; of those — especially little children — who hoped to receive and were disappointed. Think of the destitute father looking upon his children as they wistfully watched the toys and presents received by more fortunate playfellows. What were the feelings in that parent's heart, what the feelings of the child's? Ah! your Christmas was a cruel time and your custom a cruel one."

"Viewed in that light," answered Professor Dean gravely, "I will admit there are grounds for your criticism. You say there are other features of improvement. Tell me of them. I'm interested."

"The subject is rather too extensive to go into at the present time," answered General Mainwarren, "but I'll mention one or two instances which happen to come to my mind at the moment. Take our newspapers, for example. We don't allow our newspapers to promote national blindness as in your day. The smallest size of type which may be used, as also

numerous other details as to the printing of a newspaper, are carefully regulated by law in the interests of the public eyesight."

"Not at all a bad idea!" commented the Professor.

"Then, again, take our attitude toward drunkenness. We have recognized that what drove men to frenzy in drink and largely promoted drunkenness was not so much the liquor itself as the adulterations in the liquor. Our methods of inspection of all liquors publicly sold, as also of the public food supply, are very elaborate, and our laws on the subject of adulteration are extremely stringent. In this respect, I am glad to say, our people are immeasurably better off than were the people of your day."

"You speak in a kindly way of the people and seem to have their welfare at heart," ventured the Professor. "This being so, I am astonished that you don't reverse your policy."

"My policy —— ?"

"As to the restriction of the coal supply."

General Mainwarren started slightly.

"I must ask you to excuse me from discussing that," he answered, somewhat stiffly.

"Very well," said the Professor, slightly nettled, "but there is one other point upon which I think I have a right to receive your answer. It is this: Under Colonel Cuming's roof, you will remember, you somewhat bitterly arraigned the men of my day."

"Yes; I remember perfectly," replied General Mainwarren. "Conceding that the mass of people have certain rights, I claimed that the responsibility for present conditions lies with the people of your day, because they did not check the tendency of events in their incipiency. Of course," he added cautiously, "I haven't accepted as correct your views as to these rights. It was purely an academic discus-

sion and I conceded your point simply for the sake of argument."

"I understand the point you make," rejoined the Professor. "I was taken somewhat unawares at the time, but the matter has been rankling in my mind since. May I ask what were the methods which you later critics think we might have adopted to this end?"

"My dear Professor," protested General Mainwarren, "that's a subject which to treat fully would call for most extended discussion. Suffice it to say, that in those days the people had the free exercise of the ballot and with their votes they could have done pretty well what they pleased."

"Ah, you really think so!" exclaimed the Professor with some sarcasm. "You forget our great political machines, and that they practically controlled affairs; substantially, even if covertly, directing the so-called will of the people!"

"I'm fully aware of that," answered General Mainwarren, "but the man who stands idly beneath a tree, with open mouth, awaiting the fruit to drop, is apt to go away disappointed. What was needed was a slow, steady, methodical education of the people, which would have placed them upon a higher plane. With eyes fully opened to the situation, they would have been superior to the two great political machines. There seems to have been no steady, earnest, well-directed effort to accomplish this — no one to undertake it!"

"How might this have been done?" questioned the Professor.

"Oh, in various ways."

"Tell me one?"

"Since you insist, my dear Professor," answered the General, "I'll point out one way which has been

suggested and which I had the pleasure of discussing some time ago with one of our most eminent sociologists, Doctor Arthur Melbourne."

"I'm all interest!" exclaimed the Professor. "That way was?"

"You have intimated," continued General Mainwarren, "that the political machines held the voters so securely that the power of these professional politicians could not be overthrown by any opposition which was started against them. You have not said, but I know it, that such desultory opposition as was tried from time to time always met with discouragement and defeat. Nor have you pointed out that the leaders who controlled these two great political machines were themselves controlled by the moneyed powers of the land, who stood in the background and pulled the strings which moved the puppets. This — all this — is well realized and understood by the student of to-day."

"Let us concede these facts," rejoined the Professor; "but what then?"

"It has been suggested," continued General Mainwarren, "that a wise course for patriotic leaders of your day would have been to have abandoned the hope of converting and securing the grown voters as a body. It would have been best for them, at a given time, to have said: 'Beginning from to-day, we will pay no attention to any male who is more than fifteen years of age and who is now, or within the next six years will be, entitled to a vote. But we will direct all efforts to an entirely new body of suffragists.' They should then have turned their attention to the *women of the land,* to the mothers of future generations of voters. It has been said that 'Every woman is at heart a royalist!' It could with equal truth be said, 'Every woman is by nature a politi-

cian.' It is true that women, as a body, appear to devote little interest to politics, but this is because few women have been given opportunity of acquiring any knowledge on the subject, or of taking active part in such matters. But whenever woman has had such opportunity, she has shown herself to be an ardent politician. Look at the influence exerted politically by various women of whom history speaks. Take it even in your own day. Whenever there happened to be some movement — say a moral reform movement — in which the women of the country took an active interest, as they did now and again, did it not invariably happen that that movement was successful at the polls?"

The Professor reflected a moment.

"Yes," he answered; "the facts show that you are correct as to this."

"There, then," continued General Mainwarren, "lay the hope and the chance of your patriotic leaders. They should have started missionary work upon a comprehensive scale among the women of the land. They should have educated womankind politically — have indicated to woman where and why the shoe pinched and what was the remedy. She should have been shown that the remedy lay in the generations of voters to come and that those generations were directly under her influence and in her keeping."

"I begin to see your drift," said the Professor thoughtfully.

"Meetings should have been held for the instruction of women; political clubs maintained; and literature circulated for them which was sufficiently light, clear and instructive. 'Do you want your sons to struggle on under the same blighting, toilsome conditions as their fathers struggled?' should have been

the watchword, and it would have been a watchword to which the maternal heart would eagerly have responded. The women would have educated their children — not merely the boys but also the girls who were to become the wives of future voters — and within a very few years you would have had a new generation of voters sufficiently powerful and sufficiently well-instructed to have bid the old political machines open and successful defiance. With the women of the land lay one of your great chances, but that chance you utterly neglected."

The Professor was about to reply when the voice of Kearns, who had been in conversation with Colonel Cuming, broke in upon them:

"Excuse me, Professor," he exclaimed, "but I see their Majesties have long since retired and the ball-room is beginning to thin out somewhat. Isn't it time we went? No doubt all this life and go and all these beautiful ladies are very interesting to you — in spite of your hundred years — but you must remember that I have work before me to-morrow. I'm no longer a gentleman of leisure, you know."

Before the Professor could reply, Colonel Cuming again addressed Kearns, directing his attention to some personage in the ball-room, and the Professor turned to General Mainwarren.

"No longer a gentlemen of leisure," he said, rather sadly; "that, too, was one of the subjects in my mind. I was thinking what I should turn to — what place I could find, if any — in this new world into which I have tumbled. Our friend, Kearns, has been fortunate in finding his old-time cunning in demand, even at the hands of kings. But I wonder if I can in these days profitably resume my former researches and work. Would there be any demand

for the various inventions I have in mind — my airship, for instance?"

General Mainwarring started perceptibly.

"Professor Dean," he said gravely, "I have had a high regard for you from the moment of our first meeting. In fact, long before that your name was known to me and your attainments in the domain of science held my respect. Ah, Professor, you have probably done for the world more than you know!"

"Come, come, General!" exclaimed the Professor, "this is sheer flattery. You are amusing yourself at my expense, I fear. I hardly expected this of you."

"I speak only the truth!" said the General solemnly.

"We will let that pass," replied the Professor somewhat testily. "You have not yet answered my question. Do you think the invention I have mentioned would find any market in these days?"

"I was coming to that point," answered General Mainwarren. "I see no reason why your — your — invention when completed should not yield beneficial results."

"Completed!" replied the Professor, "as far as that is concerned, it is substantially completed."

"Perfected!" exclaimed General Mainwarren, with an air of astonishment.

"Yes," replied the Professor.

"You could in — in — a comparatively short time," resumed General Mainwarren, "turn out a practical airship! Do you mean this?"

"Absolutely," replied the Professor confidently.

General Mainwarren reflected for some moments.

"Professor Dean," he said presently, "I'll make you a proposition. Under these new conditions you need some one to guide your efforts and to properly

market the product of your brain. I invite you to come with me to Pennsylvania, and pursue your researches and your work. It will be a mutual enterprise. As for the terms, there will be no difference between us as to that; they shall be of your own making."

"You mean this?" exclaimed the Professor in astonishment.

"Positively," answered General Mainwarren firmly; "I make you this as an offer. You are to pursue your researches and your work at your leisure and I am to supply such funds, or other promotive assistance, as may be needed. The benefits accruing we'll share jointly, upon such terms as you yourself shall dictate. It's a simple business proposition. Do you accept?"

"The conditions are certainly most liberal!" exclaimed the Professor. "I ——"

"Why, then, do you hesitate?"

"May I ask when this offer is to go into effect?"

"Immediately."

"Ah, exclaimed the Professor deprecatingly, "I don't want to leave my friend Kearns so suddenly. I must ask for some time in which to reach a decision."

"By all means," answered General Mainwarren, "but I ask it as a condition that you will not enter into any negotiation or discussion on this subject with outsiders until you have given me an answer. In a word, you are to treat this proposition as entirely confidential between us. Have I your word for this?"

The words had scarcely left General Mainwarren's lips and before the Professor could make reply, there came from the grounds outside the palace the sharp blast of a bugle, hoarse shouts of command and the sounds of moving men. In an instant the scene in

the ball-room changed from one of gayety and frivolity to earnestness, joined to some confusion. Military officers quitted their partners and hurried forth, while the beautifully gowned women looked into one another's faces with questioning glances. The diplomats gathered in little groups, exchanging whispers. A current of unrest, of uneasiness, had suddenly swept over the brilliant scene — a general presentiment that something momentous had happened.

Again the bugles pealed forth, with a roll of drums in the distance. Still the guests sat, or stood, looking askance into one another's faces. The music stopped.

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. It seemed as if the familiar words might be paraphrased: "Uneasy are those who live within the shadow of a throne."

A messenger entered the ball-room and, glancing about him, made his way to where Kearns sat. There was agitation in his manner and his words came sharp and terse:

"You are commanded, sir, to repair at once to His Majesty's chamber."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW CAME THIS TO PASS

Out of the ball-room the messenger rapidly led the way. They were whisked up on an electric elevator; and along a passage, lined with sentinels, they hurried until they reached the private apartments of the King.

In the first, or outer, chamber were gathered several officers, talking together eagerly. They passed through the chamber to a door at the further end, where they were stopped by a Captain of the Guards, who was evidently the officer on duty. At a whispered word from the messenger, the officer moved aside. The messenger opened the door and, stepping back, motioned Kearns to pass in alone to the sleeping-apartment of the King.

Kearns instantly took in the details of the scene which presented itself as the door closed behind him — a spacious and brilliantly lighted apartment, with a rather small alcove in which was set the royal couch. Two persons were in the apartment — the King, seated on the side of the couch, his face pale and troubled, holding a paper in his hand; and, standing beside him, Lord Ashley, looking very grave.

Lying in disorder at the King's feet was a large coverlid of gayly colored silk, which appeared to have been thrown or dropped on the floor in the confusion.

The King motioned to Kearns to approach. Kearns advanced and bowed.

"See!" said the King.

He motioned to Lord Ashley, who raised the silken coverlid. Kearns bent eagerly forward and, despite the royal presence, a sharp, low whistle of astonishment escaped him.

Stretched at full length upon the floor, his limbs rigid in death, the thick blood oozing from nostrils and mouth, lay the King's great mastiff, with a bullet through his heart.

Kearns stood gazing intently at the corpse; then raised his eyes to glance about him for possible clews as to the quarter whence death had been dealt. But the King again drew his attention.

"Read!" he said, extending to Kearns the scroll he held in his hand.

Kearns took the paper, which was thick and heavy and was rolled in the form of a cylinder. Unfolding it he read:

The bullet which pierces your dog's heart might as readily have reached yours. Heed the warnings given while it is yet time. The hour fast approaches.

Kearns slowly read the document, refolded it carefully and, still holding it in his hand, addressed the King.

"I'd like to keep this," he said, "for further examination. I can't tell but it may contain a clew."

"As you will," answered the King abstractedly. "You note what is said: As the bullet pierced the dog's heart, so might it have pierced ours. And it's true," he added with a shudder, "horribly true! As the late Czar of Russia, Zoldau the First, foully perished, so ——"

Lord Ashley hastily interrupted.

"You forget, Sire," he exclaimed, "that while it's true His Majesty, the late Czar, Zoldau the First, died suddenly while asleep, yet it was officially certified to by the Court physicians that he died of acute indigestion superinduced by ——"

"A dagger, driven through his heart while he slept," interposed the King. "Yes," he added with ghastly irony, "such things usually are acutely indigestible."

"Sire," said Lord Ashley, "there are certain State secrets which His Grace, the Lord Chancellor, would, I know, highly disapprove being disclosed. It is not well that such rumors ——"

"Rumors!" exclaimed the King with violence, "think you, Milord, that these things are safely locked within the walls of the Chancellery! Think you that such secrets are securely hidden? that they are not whispered about among the people? Ah, don't deceive yourself. But what care we as to this! All the efforts of our officers, our soldiers, our Secret Service have failed to protect us from these visitations. We would that he," and he turned to Kearns, "should know all that he may fully grasp the necessities of the situation and measure the danger."

Lord Ashley bowed a respectful acquiescence.

"It's horrible — horrible!" continued the King with nervous energy. "It's easy enough to face death in a charge against the enemy as you soldiers face it, but to wait and watch day after day, day after day, never knowing from what quarter death may be creeping upon you from some lurking assassin — ah, that's different. It's horrible — horrible!"

Kearns looked upon the King and a feeling akin to pity came into his heart. In the course of his varied career, he had seen men in a similar predicament and he well knew that this constant fear of attack from some mysterious and unknown quarter was a situation such as to wring the stoutest heart.

The King drew himself together with a strong effort.

"Whence came this shot?" he asked again turning to Kearns.

Kearns glanced about him. There were four windows to the apartment; two of these were closed; the others were open. All four windows were securely shaded with heavy blinds. Kearns crossed over and carefully examined each window-casing and shade.

"Was it through a window?" continued the King.

"Possibly, Sire," answered Kearns.

"You say possibly," exclaimed the King, somewhat petulantly, "yet how is it possible? On the ground directly beneath those windows are two sentinels; on the roof directly above are two other sentinels. The trees of the park are many feet away and from them no shot could be fired which could possibly strike at the angle this shot struck. Besides, you see the shades are undisturbed; no bullet has passed through them. How do you account for all this?"

"I'll know far more by this time to-morrow, Sire," answered Kearns calmly, "after I've concluded my investigations. In the meantime, I ask that nothing here be disturbed."

"And you will speak then to-morrow?" exclaimed the King eagerly.

"It was agreed, Sire," said Kearns, with dignity, "in order to ensure my usual success, that I should be permitted to pursue my usual methods. I'll speak, Sire, at my usual time."

"Speak at your usual time!" repeated the King, apparently somewhat bewildered. "And when is that?"

Kearns touched the foot of the prostrate dog lightly with his own.

"When," he answered with cold determination, "when I hold the assassins within my net — securely within my grasp!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUNTERPLOT

"Tell me, Professor," said Kearns to Dean at fourteen o'clock on the following day, "I've reason to believe I'll need you badly in clearing up matters here. Will you help me?"

"I'm a little hurt at the question," replied the Professor. "I should have hoped you would have taken the answer as a matter of course. How long will you need me? I'm at your service regardless of the length of time; but I ask because the last thing General Mainwarren did before leaving for Pennsylvania this morning was to request me to communicate with him speedily regarding the offer which he made me."

"How long shall I need you?" repeated Kearns reflectively. "I can't say. That depends, I imagine, largely upon you."

"Very well," answered Professor Dean, "General Mainwarren will have to wait. Suppose you begin by telling me how I can be of use to you."

"I have already explained to you the nature of the case," said Kearns. "I had another interview with His Nibs — that is — ah— His Majesty, I mean — this morning, but it did not result in my ascertaining anything of value beyond that which I already knew."

"Indeed!" commented the Professor.

"No. It seems," continued Kearns, "that after returning from the ball, the King immediately dis-

robed, retired, and was soon sound asleep. He was awakened by a sharp bark from the dog and sprang up just in time to see the animal fall in its death agony. At the same moment he noticed the flutter of the white paper on the floor."

"Was there no sound of a shot — no smoke?" asked the Professor.

"No," answered Kearns, "but there's nothing wonderful in that, because I've found that to-day there exists not only a smokeless powder, but also one that's noiseless. Moreover, they have powerful compressed-air guns from which such a shot could have been noiselessly fired."

"Quite so," assented the Professor. "And what is your theory as to how that paper came there?"

"Gently, Professor," exclaimed Kearns. "Let's take up matters in their regular order. We'll put off the discussion of that point for the moment. I've told you what the paper contained. It was simply a warning, accompanied by the threat that the next warning received would be the last. It was a brief document compared to others the King has received."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; the visit of last night was the fourth. Upon the first occasion, the King found beside his couch a lengthy document embodying demands and threats."

"And what was the nature of these demands?"

"Oh, they were quite lengthy and detailed," answered Kearns, "and were in the nature of demands that he should bring about certain industrial and economic changes, after which he was to abdicate and restore the country to a Republic, with either a President elected for a term of years, or at most a life President. Failing to comply with these demands, he was threatened with death as a usurper and an enemy of the people."

"From whom is this document supposed to have emanated?" asked Professor Dean.

"To find that out," answered Kearns, "is the very mission upon which I am employed. I've learned that there exists, as might be expected, a strong body among the people who are opposed to the new order of things and want to restore the Republic upon substantially its original lines. They are what we would call revolutionists, but the term given to them at the Court is 'Reactionists.' They are a secret body, much like the Nihilists of Russia, and all efforts to discover and uproot them have so far proved unavailing. Here and there certain conspiracies have been from time to time unearthed and the conspirators either executed or imprisoned, under High Treason laws which are now in full force. The captured men have always suffered like martyrs and have gone to their doom resisting all temptations to make disclosures. It's known that the Reactionists are divided into bodies governed by presidents and that over them all is one supreme, able and powerful head known as the High President. Beyond this, practically nothing has been discovered by the spies of the King."

"You've raised a very serious question," said the Professor gravely. "As true Americans, with whom ought our lot to be cast? With the monarchy, or with these — these Reactionists?"

"I've thought of that," answered Kearns, "but what are we to do? We've tumbled into this state of affairs, and it seems to me we must take things as we find them. The monarchy to us is a visible and tangible fact, whereas if we started out to-morrow to find the Reactionists we wouldn't know where to look for them, nor whether they would want anything to do with us if we found them. Remember, too, that

here we are, pitchforked into this new world, without visible means of support, and the first thing for a man to do is to find a sphere of occupation and employment. I'm retained to make certain discoveries in my particular line of professional usefulness. I'm like a scientist employed to analyze the contents of a particular stomach, or an advocate retained to present a certain line of facts favorable to a given side. I disclose the results of that analysis, or I present that particular line of facts regardless of those who may be affected thereby. It's strictly in the line of my professional activity — entirely within the scope of my professional work and entirely conventional and proper. It doesn't seem to me that it would be wise, though, for us to plunge into the troubled sea of politics — at least for the present."

"There is much truth in what you say," replied the Professor. "Such discussion is, I suppose, fruitless. What more did you discover?"

"First let me ask you a few questions," retorted Kearns. "How about that steering balloon — that air-ship — of yours? How near was it to completion when you went to sleep?"

"My air-ship!" repeated the Professor with astonishment. "The invention, as far as related to all the main points of discovery, was practically completed at the time this misfortune befell us."

"Misfortune!" repeated Kearns. "I really don't know whether that's the right way to put it. Remember if it hadn't been for that misfortune, you and I would be shades, playing harps upon some damp cloud, for perhaps the last quarter of a century. A live scientist is worth a dozen dead geniuses any time. However, never mind about that. Let's come back to the balloon."

"The air-ship!" corrected the Professor.

"Well, then, the air-ship," continued Kearns. "Tell me about it."

"Ah," exclaimed the Professor with enthusiasm, "that involves quite an explanation on the subject of aëro-mechanics."

"Is it like a balloon?" questioned Kearns.

"My dear sir," exclaimed the Professor, "my air-ship differs as much from a balloon as a modern steamship from a mediæval caravel. Drifting aimlessly about between earth and sky in a balloon at the mercy of the air currents is one thing; to travel rapidly through space and navigate the air at will is an entirely different proposition. This latter is what my air-ship does."

"Ah!"

"Yes; not only are you enabled in my air-ship," continued the Professor, "to travel through space at a rate of speed exceeding that of the fastest steam engines of our time, but you can navigate absolutely at will. The motive power is stored electricity, joined to a new force which I discovered, and which is one of the important features of my invention. I'll not touch upon the suspensory power," continued the Professor, launching forth upon his theme with the enthusiasm of the scientist, "for that is too simple. Let me explain to you the combined motor and atmospheric counter resistant forces by which the aërial guidance is ensured. Imagine a central turret — we owe the basic invention on this point to the distinguished scientist Roowalter — a central turret, I say, furnished with powerful concentric screws connected with a number of lateral phalanxes, or ——"

"Merciful powers, Professor!" cried Kearns, "you make my head swim. Why, man alive, you might as well explain all this to a stone wall as to

me, for all I understand of it. Your thing floats and travels fast and can be steered, eh?"

"Precisely," answered the Professor indulgently.

"And how big is it?"

"You can build it any size you please," replied the Professor. "It can be built so large as to ——"

"What is the smallest practical size?"

"About as small as an ordinary row-boat, only somewhat deeper and more pointed at the prow."

"It can be made to stand absolutely still in space?" continued Kearns.

"Again, I will compare it to a row-boat," replied the Professor. "If the motor power be shut off it will remain practically still, drifting more or less lightly in the air currents, just as a row-boat, unpropelled by the oars, drifts in the water according as the currents are more or less strong."

"But suppose you could grapple with an anchor or other attachment, to the trunk of a tree, or the side of some structure, would it take much force to hold your machine perfectly still?" questioned Kearns.

"Very little," answered the Professor, "in fact, I can again best illustrate by suggesting a row-boat held steady by a boat-hook."

"Just so," answered Kearns slowly and with a thoughtful air; "I think I understand. And how long," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "would it take you to build a machine of this character?"

"Of what size?"

"Oh, the smallest size."

"That would depend," answered the Professor, "upon the facilities at my command. Given a shop fully and efficiently equipped, I could turn out my air-ship in a remarkably short time. Like most good

things, it presents the merit of much simplicity after once the right principles have been discovered. You see ——"

"What do you call a short time," interrupted Kearns, "assuming you had the highest facilities?"

"Oh, I wouldn't like to specify exactly ——"

"Tell me," broke in Kearns impetuously; "would it be a day — a month — a year?"

"Since you insist," replied the Professor, "under pressure and assuming that I was furnished with the highest facilities, my invention is so well advanced and the practical details are so clearly outlined in my mind that I could produce an air-ship of the smaller type in from two to three weeks."

Kearns sprang forward with a joyous exclamation.

"Professor," he cried, "you shall build that machine. You shall have the highest facilities — the very highest facilities — I promise you, but it must be ready within a month at latest!"

"Why — why — what do you mean?" exclaimed the Professor with mingled joy and astonishment.

"Never mind!" retorted Kearns. "Suffice it that the King will refuse me nothing I need to assist me in my investigations. And now, I have one other question to ask. Does your machine leak at times?"

"Leak!" repeated the Professor, bewildered.

"Well, I mean," explained Kearns, "does it ever exude, drop, drip, let fall — or whatever you like to call it — a liquid of any kind?"

"Oh, I see what you mean!" exclaimed the Professor, his face lighting up. "Why, yes. To the right side and below the level of the main turret, there is a secondary storage box. The decomposition of the chemicals in this box produces the power to ——"

"Now, Professor," interrupted Kearns, "please don't wax technical. Remember, as I told you, a

stone wall is a light and airy thing compared to my density as to matters mechanical."

"Very well, O marvel of density!" retorted the Professor with light sarcasm; "I will endeavor to explain so that even your benighted brain may grasp and understand. What would you do if you had a grate full of coals and the coals had burned out and you wanted more fire?"

"I suppose," replied Kearns mischievously, "that I should ring the bell and tell the servant to make up the fire."

"And how would the servant do it?"

"I suppose by putting on more coals," answered Kearns cautiously.

"Indeed!" sniffed the Professor contemptuously, "does it not occur to you — O man of self-vaunted thickness! — that the servant might indulge in some operation prior to putting on those fresh coals?"

"Huh!" exclaimed Kearns, with a puzzled expression; "I suppose you mean that there would first be a raking out of the ashes."

"Good!" exclaimed the Professor; "you are beginning to betray an intelligence which is almost human. Now, so it is in the case of the air-ship. In that secondary storage box to which I have referred are certain chemicals which furnish power. When a portion of these chemicals have exhausted their activity, a residuum gradually forms, corresponding to the ashes in your grate, only it is in liquid form instead of solid. This residuum is allowed to escape through a valve and is thus carried away and, of course, the storage box is fed from time to time, as may be required, with fresh energy-producing chemicals."

"Let me see if I understand it," persisted Kearns with obstinacy. "This liquid residuum, as you call

it, leaks away through the bottom of the air-ship, doesn't it?"

"You may put it that way," said the Professor, smiling.

"And that blamed old dripping liquid residuum would either burn into, or else make a deep brown stain upon any fairly soft material it touched, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the Professor excitedly; "a dark brown stain. But how — how did you know this?"

"Not bad, eh?" retorted Kearns, "for a marvel of density! In course of time — O sage of a century of Wisdom! — and under your able direction, you'll find that almost human intelligence of mine gradually developing itself."

"But how did you know this?" persisted the Professor.

"Patience! O Aged Wise Man of the decomposing chemicals, main turrets and cylindrical tubes," retorted Kearns; "patience, I say! Didn't I tell you that under my methods everything must come in its proper order? Listen, then, and you'll learn."

"I'm all attention," said the Professor.

"I commenced my operations this morning," began Kearns, "by making a thorough examination of the *locus*. I'll not weary you with a long description of the preliminary details of my investigation — how I extracted and took possession of the bullet which had been fired and thoroughly examined the apartment, its surroundings — everything."

"I think we may trust you for that," remarked the Professor, with a smile.

"The King's sleeping-apartment," continued Kearns, "is in the extreme western wing of the palace. It is a spacious apartment, with two alcoves.

One of these alcoves contains the royal couch; the other, the royal bath. There are four windows and two doors. One of these doors — that leading out on the passage — is securely sealed from the inside; the other leads into the antechamber. In this antechamber there is on duty every night a Captain of the Guard, and the outer corridor is watched by three sentinels. At the extreme end of the corridor is another apartment also at the disposal of the Captain of the Guard. Should anyone appear at the end of the corridor, the sentinel would signal to his comrade, who would in turn signal to the third sentinel and the officer on duty would come forth and receive the visitor in the apartment at the extreme end of the corridor. This is done to prevent any sound in the antechamber disturbing the King."

"Quite elaborate precautions, I see," commented the Professor.

"Just so," resumed Kearns. "Now, last night, Captain Bingham, of the Guard, was on duty and I'm satisfied from what he tells me that no one visited the corridor after the King had retired. In fact, nothing happened until the sharp ring of the electric signal in the King's chamber caused Captain Bingham to rush in and we know what he found there."

"Yes, yes," assented the Professor.

"I said I wouldn't weary you by going into unnecessary details," continued Kearns, "so I'll omit the further investigations pursued by me and come to the point at once by telling you that I'm satisfied that no attack came from either the corridor or the antechamber. It came from without."

"From the windows?"

"Exactly. There are four windows to the apartment. Two of these were closed last night and two

open. All were shaded by heavy blinds which had been drawn fully down. The windows are forty-five feet from the ground and fifty-five feet below the palace roof. The grounds immediately beneath are patrolled by two sentinels, and on the roof immediately above are two other sentinels. The windows look out upon the park and the nearest tree to any of the four windows is sixty-five feet away."

"It would seem a safe enough retreat and one certainly very difficult of approach by an enemy," remarked the Professor.

"And yet," replied Kearns, "that was the point from which the attack came. The King is extremely fond of air. He experiences a sense of suffocation whenever he is closed in an apartment which is not sufficiently airy. Confident in the sentinels above and below and in the inaccessibility of his chamber, it has been his custom to sleep with two of the windows open. I examined these windows carefully, inside and out. I discovered only one thing. It was not much and yet — yet — I think it means something."

"What was it?" inquired the Professor eagerly.

"On the under side of the stone ledge under one of the windows, I discovered three sharp scratches and four small but rather deep indentations."

"Ah! is that all?" exclaimed the Professor with an air of disappointment.

"That was all," replied Kearns calmly, "yet to me it means something."

"What do you think?"

"That by gripping onto the under part of that window ledge, something was held in place there — moored, if you so like to call it."

"I fail to follow you," remarked the Professor.

"Very well, then," said Kearns, "if that's the

case, we'll leave the window and maybe you can follow me into the grounds. But before doing that, let me tell you one other fact I discovered. It was this: I inquired into the exact dates on which the three previous attacks had taken place and made another little discovery."

"What was it?"

"Was there any moon last night?" asked Kearns, suddenly breaking off.

"No," answered the Professor, after a moment's reflection; "the last quarter went out three nights ago."

"And last night was quite a dark night, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied the Professor; "slightly hazy and overcast."

"Any heavy wind?"

"No," answered the Professor.

"Just so," continued Kearns, "and it was the same on the occasions of the other three attacks. I've consulted the weather records and in each case found a night following shortly after the wane of the moon's last quarter — a dark, starless night, with light winds. Do you begin to scent an African in the woodpile?"

"I fear I must have a cold," retorted the Professor, "for so far my sense of smell detects nothing."

"Very well," answered Kearns, "follow me into the grounds. I carefully examined the trees there — not merely the trunks, but also the tops. And among the leaves and branches of some of the tops I discovered something more."

"Yes."

"That a number — quite a large number — of the leaves had great blotches where they had been eaten

away and a number of the twigs and boughs had big brown splashes. I followed these marks in a westerly direction until I came to the river. There I lost them and all efforts failed to discover where they resumed on the bank. Now, do you begin to discover anything?"

"Speak out," cried the Professor in ill-restrained excitement; "say what you mean!"

"I'll endeavor to make it plain to your intelligence, O man of self-convicted density!" retorted Kearns triumphantly. "What do you think was the something which could come, in dead of night, under the window, forty-five feet above the ground, and be unseen by the sentinels above and below; the something which put a mark upon the stone ledge as if it had been moored there by the sharp prongs of a boat-hook; the something that leaves behind it burns and dark brown stains upon the leaves and branches of the trees?"

"What — what — can be the meaning of this?" stammered the Professor, his face working with excitement.

"That there are," rejoined Kearns, "other distinguished scientists and inventors besides Professor Dean — that the work he dropped fifty years ago has been taken up by others and secretly perfected."

"An air-ship — an air-ship!" gasped the Professor.

"Yes," retorted Kearns, "yes, O man of cranks and cog-wheels, an air-ship. An air-ship coming on dark and windless nights, between moons, passing unseen the sentinels on turret and in grounds, and mooring under the windows of the King to deliver its attack. So will it come again! And it is with an air-ship, designed and built by you, that we must and can alone meet the attack."

CHAPTER XV

THE EAVESDROPPER OF THE QUEEN'S WALK

"Say, Dorothy!" cried Beatrice Cuming, sweeping into Miss Brandon's apartment with the energy and enthusiasm of a miniature cyclone; "I'm so glad to catch you alone — so glad! I was afraid somebody would be here and I wouldn't have a chance to talk to you right away."

Dorothy shifted her fair head from its position on the cushions of her easy-chair and turned her blue eyes upon the speaker.

"Why, what has happened, Trixy?" she asked with languid interest. "It must, of course, be something of much importance, considering it's almost an hour since you left me."

"An hour!" exclaimed Beatrice; "let me tell you, a whole catalogue of wonderful things can happen in an hour. And so it is here. I've a whole bookful to tell you — a romance — a love affair — a tragedy!"

"Your introduction is certainly promising, Trixy, dear," remarked Dorothy with the same languid interest, "but it's rather lengthy. Remember, long introductions to romances have been out of fashion since the days of our great-grandmothers. Wouldn't it be well to begin your story?"

"I don't know just how to begin it," answered Beatrice ingenuously, "it's so interesting. But," she added suddenly, "you're quite sure you meant what you told me the other day?"

"Told you the other day?" inquired Dorothy, puzzled; "told you about what?"

"About your not caring anything for him, of course?"

"And who may '*him*' be?" asked Dorothy, with an ever so slight change of voice.

"Why, Captain Mortimer, of course!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, her face flushing slightly, "of course not. How silly you are, Trixy!"

"Well," replied Beatrice, "I thought I'd make quite sure, you know. Dear old papa says I'm always blundering into things without first making proper inquiry, so I thought I'd make quite sure in this case. I wonder who it can be, though?"

"Who what can be?"

"Never mind!" retorted Beatrice; "listen to my story first, and we can then put our heads together and try to guess who the *she* is."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, slightly arching her eyebrows, "you have really decided to begin, then?"

"Stop, Dorothy," protested Beatrice, "don't tease me! You'll drive some of it out of my head and I don't want to forget anything. Let me see; where shall I begin? Oh, yes! Well; after I left you I went for a stroll in the park. It was such a beautiful day; the smell of the flowers and the grasses was so sweet that I kept on and on almost to the end of the Queen's Walk. Presently I felt tired and looked about me for a place to rest. I saw a seat some little distance away and I kept on until I reached it and there I sat down. Do you follow me, Dorothy?"

"I find no difficulty in doing so thus far, Trixy," answered Dorothy, with a smile. "Consider that I've followed you to the seat at the end of the Queen's Walk."

"I hadn't been there more than a few minutes," resumed Beatrice, "when I noticed, around a bend in the path, two officers approaching. Who do you think they were?"

"Remember, Trixy," answered Dorothy, "you are supposed to be telling a story — not propounding riddles!"

"Why, Captain Swords and Captain Mortimer, Dorothy!"

"Indeed!" remarked Dorothy very quietly.

"Yes. They were talking together and they didn't see me. What do you think I did, Dorothy?"

"Now you are asking a riddle, Trixy," replied Dorothy. "You waited until they came up, I suppose, and then monopolized their attention during the rest of the promenade!"

"All wrong — all wrong!" cried Beatrice gayly; "nothing of the kind! Right back of my seat was a big tree, or bush — as high as this room and half as big around. Watching them closely and being quite sure they hadn't seen me, I crept around to the back of that bush and hid."

"Hid!" exclaimed Dorothy in astonishment; "why, what was your object in doing that?"

"Just this," said Beatrice, with a merry laugh; "I thought they might take the seat I had left and, if they did, what fun it would be to creep up behind them and drop a few grains of gravel down the collar of Ralph's uniform."

"Oh, the idea!" exclaimed Dorothy, with a shocked air. "And, Trixy," severely, "since when have you taken to calling the officers of the Guard by their first names?"

"Captain Swords, I should say, of course," replied Beatrice, not in the least abashed; "but he's so jolly and all his brother officers call him Ralph.

It seems so much easier to call him that. What a brave fellow he must be, too! Captain Bingham was telling me how he — Ral — Captain Swords, I mean — rode out to retake the abandoned guns at Vladivlik and how he was wounded. Oh, I just thrilled as I listened to that story."

"Yes," exclaimed Dorothy, apparently catching Beatrice's enthusiasm, "but Captain Mortimer was there, too. It was he, after all, who brought in the guns and, though wounded, carried Captain Swords from under the Russian fire."

"Yes; and Ralph — Captain Swords, I mean — was decorated with the Columbia Cross," said Beatrice.

"So was Captain Mortimer," replied Dorothy, "besides receiving mention in General Orders. But," she added hastily, "are we going to discuss the Russian War, dear, or are you going on with your story?"

"I'm sure it must have been you who interrupted me, dear," rejoined Beatrice imperturbably. "Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes! I had hidden behind the big bush. Well, on they came and, sure enough, they seated themselves at the very place I had just left. For a while they sat there quite still. Neither of them said anything and from my hiding-place I could smell the smoke of their cigars. I was trying to find some gravel, but I couldn't discover any behind the bush, so I was stooping down looking for some pebbles of the right size, when suddenly Captain Swords' voice came to me. 'Stanley, old fellow,' he said, 'there's been something wrong with you the last few days. Won't you speak out and tell me what's the matter? Usually there are no secrets between us.'

"It seemed to me a long time before the other made any reply, but at last his voice came to me.

"'Ralph,' he said, 'I want to get out of this — to get away from here. I've made up my mind to leave the Guard and exchange into the Tenth, or some other regiment.'

"'You astonish me, Stanley,' replied Captain Swords; 'for I thought it was rather jolly here and that you found it so, too. But, be that as it may, if you want to exchange, then exchange let it be for both of us. Just say the word — when?'

"'What! You'll leave the Imperial Guard, too?' the other exclaimed.

"'Yes,' said Captain Swords, 'we've always been together. Whenever you go, I go with you. Still, I'd like to know just what has put you out of sorts with things here.'

"Again there was a long pause before there came an answer. I was puzzling just what I ought to do — whether to come out and announce myself, or stay quietly where I was. You see, having unintentionally listened so far, I was embarrassed and didn't know quite what to do. Before I could make up my mind, Captain Mortimer again spoke.

"'Ralph,' he said, 'I'll be quite frank with you. Before I came to this cursed Court, my experiences with women had been the ordinary ones of a soldier. I hadn't been here a week, though, before I met one who appealed to me as no other woman ever had. No need for me to name her. You know whom I mean.'

"'The women here do seem to have a decidedly queer effect upon a man,' answered Captain Swords. 'I have noticed that. But I didn't mean to interrupt. Go on, Stanley.'

"'Ralph,' said the other one, and his voice seemed

to me to shake as he spoke, 'I'm an infernal fool. I loved that woman — loved her passionately, reverently, madly. Her presence, her voice, her touch seemed to open the gates of heaven to me — the world was different from what it ever had looked to me before. It was heaven and yet there was a hell in it, too. Ralph, I tell you, man, if you'd be happy, never love a woman like that.'

"'Poor old fellow!' said Captain Swords."

"Excuse me, Trixy, dear," exclaimed Dorothy, suddenly wheeling her chair, "but the light hurts me. You won't mind my turning this way, will you? No, dear, don't move. I like your voice to come to me that way — from behind me. I'm listening. Continue."

"Very well, let me see where I was," resumed Beatrice. "Oh, yes; Captain Swords said: 'Poor old fellow!' and then the other continued:

"'I told you, Ralph, that I was an infernal fool and that's putting it mildly. I loved her and I was fool enough for a brief, mad period to hope — to believe — that she loved me. Lady Brooke happened to speak her name one night and incidentally mentioned a few details concerning her. Lady Brooke said she was a favorite with the Queen and that she was considered to be one of the richest heiresses of the Court. As she said the words, Ralph, I went sick all through me. I felt as when that Russian bullet hit me at Pedershof, for I had known nothing of this and here, it seemed, was an unexpected barrier between us. Lady Brooke, however, went on to say — and she warned me that this was strictly confidential, of course — that this report, like many other reports, had little foundation in fact; that in reality the lady's money was largely in expectancy as the heiress of her maternal uncle, Sir Ray Mur-

ray, the head of the Copper Trust; that Sir Ray was engaged in a war to the death with Sir Brussels Page and that the whole thing might result in Sir Ray's financial annihilation, in which case the lady's supposed millions would dwindle to nothing. It seems a strange, I might say almost a mean thing, Ralph, to rejoice at some form of ill-fortune touching the woman you adore, but the truth is the truth — I did rejoice at those words of Lady Brooke. Those millions would have been a barrier between us. Without them, I felt she was nearer to me. Lady Brooke is a handsome woman — although I never particularly took to her — but she never looked so handsome to me as at that moment. I could have laughed out — laughed out loud and long — as she spoke pityingly of the almost certain loss of those confounded millions. Just as if the man who wins her for her own sweet sake alone will not be richer than the royal heir who comes to his throne.' "

"He said that — he said that! You heard him say that?" murmured Dorothy, from her chair, in a strangely muffled voice.

"Yes; of course that's what he said," replied Beatrice, engrossed in her story. "Am I not giving you the exact words?"

"Go on — go on."

"There now! You've thrown me all out by interrupting and I've lost the thread."

"Please forgive me. What did they say next?"

"Well," resumed Beatrice, "Captain Swords asked him why he had given up hope. Why was it that he thought the lady didn't care for him?"

"Yes; yes!"

"Then the other answered him this way: 'Ralph, it's all over. I'm just as much a "goner" as a solitary picket cut off and surrounded by a sotnia of

Cossacks. You remember, Ralph, the night of the ball — the last one. I danced twice with her that night and twice, as we danced, she looked into my eyes and I could have sworn I saw the love-light there. I was encouraged, Ralph — buoyed up by my fool hopes and went blindly on to the awful ambuscade that lay for me at the end of this lover's lane I was treading. After the second dance, I walked with her in the great conservatory and there, my brain whirling, I told her — I don't know what!'

"'And she refused you?' Captain Swords asked.

"'Refused me!' the other answered, oh! so sadly; 'well, she listened to the end and then gave a little laugh, treated it all as a mere jest — a nothing — murmured some words which I was too dazed even to understand — and left me hastily to join her partner for the next dance.'

"'The cursed coquette!' I heard Captain Swords say savagely.

"Then the other turned upon Captain Swords fiercely and declared that he wouldn't hear one word of reproach spoken of her in his presence; that whatever she had done was, beyond question, right; no doubt that was the way of the ladies of the Court, and if rough soldiers, who had spent their lives in camp and field, didn't properly understand those ways, it was their fault and they ought not to complain."

"How noble — how generous!" came from the figure in the chair.

"Wasn't it, Dorothy!" continued Beatrice; "but that's not all. He said that after the lady had refused him, he remained in the conservatory for some time and then, not very well knowing what he was doing, he wandered back to the ball-room to catch another glimpse of her as she danced with that black-

looking devil, Lord Ashley, as he called him. Then he went on to say that as he stood there, Lady Brooke came up and began to talk to him. She drew his attention to the lady and asked him if she and Lord Ashley didn't make a handsome couple — she so light and he so dark. Lady Brooke said that she thought there would surely be a match, as she had been playing her cards to win Lord Ashley because of his title, and a titled husband was the one thing above everything that the lady had set her heart on."

"She said that — she said that to him!" cried Dorothy, suddenly sitting upright in her chair.

"Yes, yes; that's what she said and more too. She went on to tell him that she thought the lady would very likely succeed and would become Lady Ashley, as she was a clever and skilful angler, but did he not think that she angled for him a little too openly and too boldly?"

"Oh — oh! What ——"

"Now don't interrupt me, Dorothy," exclaimed Beatrice, completely engrossed in her story, "or I'll lose it all again. Well, when Lady Brooke said that to him the one wish in his mind, he said, was that she were a man and he would have strangled her where she stood for those words she had spoken."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and then he went on to say that whomever she chose — whether lord or commoner — would be fortunate, indeed, and that he hoped she would be as happy as he knew she was good and beautiful. Then he told Captain Swords that he should always love her, with the loyalty a soldier has for his flag; worship her with the blind idolatry of a fanatic for his God. He said that if war should again break out, it would find him at the front and that when he fell his one hope was that her face might be the last

vision to pass before his eyes; her name the last word upon his lips. Oh, Dorothy, I tell you he spoke so beautifully and so sadly of her that I just sniveled behind the bush and the sob I gave nearly betrayed me. As for Captain Swords, I could hear him pacing up and down the path and he flung his cigar away with such violence that it flew clear over the big bush and almost fell on my head. I wish I had someone to care for me like that. As for Lady Brooke ——"

At the mention of that name, Dorothy suddenly sprang from her chair and confronted Beatrice with pale face and strained, wide-staring eyes.

"The wretch — oh, the wretch!" she murmured fiercely. "Such base falsehood!"

"Why, Dorothy," exclaimed Beatrice, startled, "why are you so excited?"

"Excited! Who wouldn't be in the face of such horrible untruths — such a dreadful mistake!"

"Why, why, Dorothy!" cried Beatrice quickly. "Do you know anything of this? Who the lady is? Is she some friend of yours? Have I made you unhappy?"

Dorothy took a step forward and put her arms around Beatrice.

"Unhappy!" she stammered; "oh, I'm wretched — so wretched. No, no; I mean I'm happy — so very happy. You don't understand."

But Beatrice released herself and looked anxiously into her friend's face.

"What has happened, Dorothy?" she inquired with concern. "You are ill! You are all white and red by turns."

"No, no; you don't understand!"

"Understand, eh!" quoth Beatrice, the light of a sudden intelligence coming into her eyes. "Oh!

I see — I see. There now! Just to think of it! As papa would say, I've been blundering again."

"See! You see what?"

"But you distinctly told me," came the somewhat irrelevant answer, "that you didn't care for him!"

"Why, of course — of course not; you silly, silly goose! You don't understand — you don't understand ——"

And by way of adding to Beatrice's comprehension of the situation, Dorothy suddenly drew her to her heart, sank her head upon her shoulder, and, with great broken sobs following fast upon one another, wept as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TAP OF MILADI'S FAN

"Do you think *it* will surely come? Are you confident that this entire hypothesis of yours is correctly grounded?" and Professor Dean peered with wistful anxiety into Kearns' face.

That personage stared silently for a moment into the Professor's inquiring eyes, and then answered with imperturbability:

"Will ducks swim?"

"I believe that according to established natural laws," answered the Professor acidly, "they will."

"Will this air-ship of yours fly?"

This time the Professor's reply showed some warmth.

"Hasn't it been tested? Haven't you seen for yourself? Aren't you satisfied?" he inquired.

"Perfectly," conceded Kearns bluntly. "Well, just as sure as ducks swim and as your air-ship flies — and mighty high and rapid is its flight, I'll admit — so surely will my hypothesis, as you call it, turn out scientifically correct and I'll run my quarry to ground. I'm not accustomed to failure, you know, and I certainly can't afford to fail in this case. Didn't the warning say that the next will be the last? That means, I take it, there is going to be at least one more warning and, judging from past success, they'll adopt the same means and the same methods as before. This is just about the time when things

are due; the night, too, judging from present indications, looks as if it would be the right kind. I'd not be astonished if this was the night!"

The conversation was held in a spacious apartment of the Summer Palace immediately to the west of the King's sleeping apartment, forming part of the suite in the palace assigned to the affairs of the Chancellerie. Stretching across the apartment upon two rests, which brought it to a level with the wide bay windows, was a machine resembling in length and general contour an ordinary steam launch, but differing materially from a steam launch in its various accessory details. It was Professor Dean's much-prized air-ship — christened by Kearns "The Royal Dean."

The various component parts of this air-ship had been manufactured with much secrecy at one of the royal dockyards. The parts had then been forwarded to a secluded portion of the country, where a temporary workshop had been fitted up for the Professor. There the assembling of the parts had taken place and the final and successful tests made. Thanks to the careful and elaborate precautions taken, no inkling of the nature of the work had filtered abroad. Only three of the workmen engaged on the assembling really knew that an air-ship had been turned out, and these three were very securely taken care of for the present.

The same careful and secret precautions were observed in bringing the air-ship to the Summer Palace and installing it there. At Kearns' suggestion, the Court had abandoned the Summer Palace at the time the work was first begun, the Queen and her suite going to Emberton, and the King and his suite to the City Palace.

At last the work on the air-ship had been completed

and that portion of the Chancellerie suite adjoining the King's sleeping apartment had been given over to Kearns. There, after certain preliminary work in connection with one of the big bay windows so as to permit of the ready exit of the air-ship, the installation had taken place.

Then and not until then, Kearns gave the word and the King and Queen, accompanied by their respective suites, returned to the Summer Palace. This return took place while there were yet three nights left of the waning moon — just in the nick of time, as Kearns put it.

There was, however, one matter troubling Kearns. The necessity of secrecy and also of compactness of construction had been such that it had only been possible to construct an air-ship of very moderate dimensions — an air-ship equipped to carry only two persons. Now, one of these persons must necessarily be Professor Dean, since he alone was competent to navigate the aërial craft. Who was to be the other passenger? Equally obviously — as Kearns himself was compelled regretfully to admit — it could not be Kearns. In following the attacking party, it was impossible to predict what situations might be encountered or what exigencies might arise. To cope properly with these situations and meet these exigencies, necessarily required some person who was familiar with existing conditions and customs, otherwise the whole pursuit might result in failure and the marauders escape. A man who had only recently excited the risibilities and the wonderment of rustics by inquiring for a horse and carriage was hardly the right man for the task. Sadly and with woebegone mien, Kearns had to concede it.

The solitary passenger accompanying the Professor must be a man familiar with existing condi-

tions — a man of authority, of resource and of courage. Casting about them for a selection, neither Kearns nor the Professor could think of any person possessing better qualifications for the work in hand than Captain Stanley Mortimer, of the Imperial Guard. Following upon Beatrice's introduction and the Captain's invitation to visit his quarters, they had both formed his acquaintance; he had shown them various little attentions and kindnesses; both were impressed with him.

But Captain Mortimer's military duties as an officer of the Guard might possibly interfere with his movements on the critical night. There must also be a substitute, in case of emergency, and naturally they selected Captain Mortimer's comrade, Captain Ralph Swords.

Reluctantly, therefore, Kearns consented and subject was broached to the two officers, under strictest promise of secrecy. To no one must they breathe one word of the expedition, neither before nor after the event, until relieved from their respective promises by Mr. Kearns.

Both eagerly consented to embark upon what promised to be at least an interesting adventure. They had contemplated leaving the Imperial Guard and exchanging into another regiment, but in view of this adventure they decided to postpone matters.

Following his customary methods, Kearns communicated these selections to no one — not even to the King. Mr. Kearns liked to deal only in results.

In addition to the air-ship, there was a "little side invention," as Mr. Kearns termed it, which gave that gentleman much satisfaction and comfort. The Professor dubbed it "an aërestograph," but Kearns preferred to refer to it as "the aërial telegraph." This latter not inaptly described it. It was an instru-

ment fastened to the end of a support some four feet in height. Supplied each with one of these instruments, two persons many miles apart could interchange messages, without the use of any connecting wire, provided there were no interfering obstructions. The Professor referred to it as an exceedingly simple invention, based to some extent upon the same principles as those applied by Marconi, but with apparatus much simplified. One of these instruments was mounted in the room in the Chancellerie given over to Kearns; the other instrument was stored away in the air-ship. By rising in the air-ship to a sufficient altitude to clear intervening obstructions, there would thus be constant possibility of communication between the air-ship and Kearns. By means of this instrument, Kearns felt that he was at least in touch with the Professor and the news.

So matters stood on the night of the recorded conversation between the Professor and Kearns. The night was dark — slightly hazy and overcast — corresponding in many respects, as Kearns noted with joy, to the night when the previous visitation had taken place. To complete further the resemblance, a ball was being held in the Summer Palace — not upon the scale of magnificence of the preceding event, but a Court ball, nevertheless, with all the accessory brilliancy and gayety.

Shortly after midnight, the Professor, Kearns and Captain Mortimer sat watching in the room of the Chancellerie assigned to them. Immediately next to them, but separated by a solid wall, was the King's sleeping apartment, in the antechamber of which Captain Swords was on duty as Officer of the Day.

Not long after midnight a messenger handed a note to the sentinel at the end of the corridor. It was passed on from sentinel to sentinel until it reached

Captain Swords. It was a delicately perfumed little missive, addressed in a large and straggling feminine handwriting. The Captain tore it open and read:

"Captain Swords: Since you have been so inconsiderate as to be on guard to-night, you might at least send Captain Mortimer to dance one little waltz with me. He, too, seems to have disappeared. If you don't manage this little favor for me, you need never speak to me again. B. C.

"P. S.—I am awfully disappointed and angry.

"P. P. S.—I may be at the entrance to the Queen's Walk at fourteen o'clock to-morrow, but it would be no use for you to try to meet me there, because I should refuse to tell you anything interesting which might have taken place at the ball."

Captain Swords smiled as he read, afterward standing for a moment, reflecting, with the note between his fingers. With the air of a man who has suddenly made up his mind, he left the antechamber, walked up the corridor past the King's apartment and knocked lightly at the nearest door of the Chancellerie suite. Captain Mortimer promptly responded to the summons and a brief whispered conference took place between them. Then Captain Mortimer turned to Kearns and whispered:

"I suppose 'twouldn't do for me to absent myself for half an hour — to go downstairs for one dance."

"Why not?" replied Kearns. "The King hasn't yet retired and isn't likely to for some time. It's certainly too early to expect anything. Go, by all means, but don't stay too long."

Still Captain Mortimer hesitated.

"I shouldn't like by my absence to spoil any chance," he said.

"No danger," answered Kearns; "besides, should

anything happen unexpectedly, we could summon Captain Swords."

"But he's on duty in the King's antechamber."

"Well, we could immediately send for you to take his place."

"That would be somewhat irregular," objected Captain Mortimer.

"Go," insisted Kearns. "You'll be perfectly safe in doing so, provided you are back here by the time the King retires."

"Oh, long before that," answered the Captain, and off he started for the ball-room, Captain Swords returning to his post of duty in the antechamber.

On reaching the ball-room, Captain Mortimer had little difficulty in discovering Beatrice, seated between Dorothy Brandon and Baroness Maquehaye. He made his way to where they sat and, presenting himself before them, bowed.

"I come under orders from Captain Swords," he said to Beatrice, "to act as his proxy for this waltz. May I have that honor?"

But the young lady looked up at him with large and mischievous eyes.

"I'm so angry with Captain Swords," she answered severely, "that I'll not dance with him even by proxy. I've decided to give the waltz to Count d'Arville, of the French Legation. Ask Miss Brandon. Perhaps she may take pity on — Captain Swords' proxy."

At these audacious words, Miss Brandon turned several colors and cast a sharp and furious glance upon Beatrice, who sat demurely looking up at the Captain. Captain Mortimer also glanced quickly at the speaker, but if the glance conveyed astonishment it certainly contained no anger. With presence of mind, he turned to Dorothy.

"You've witnessed my discomfiture," he said. "Won't you take pity on me?"

"As a proxy?" she asked, with an arch upward flash of the eyes.

"As a proxy, or — as you will!"

For answer she rose and took his arm.

They gained their positions upon the floor; the band struck up the opening bars. Once more his arm encircled her; once more he held her to him, as they glided around and around, amid the maze of waltzers. Again he felt the intoxication of her presence; the sweet, pleasurable thrill of physical contact which set heart and nerves a-throb within him. Through his brain there flitted the wild phantasy that for the mad joy of holding her enfolded in his arms, her heart crushed against his heart, his lips to her lips — that for one long minute of such ecstasy he would be willing to suffer instant annihilation thereafter. Then came the thought, sharp as a sword-thrust, that perhaps this waltz was their last, their eternal farewell; that never again might he hold her thus. So they danced on, the minutes seeming as seconds, until the band played the final bar and the waltz was at an end.

Half-dazed, he started to lead her back to her seat, but with a gentle restraining pressure upon his arm, she stopped him.

"I don't want to return yet," she said, and the look she gave him was half-beseeching, half-imperious. "Let us walk around a little. You don't mind, do you?"

Mind! What was he not willing to pay for every additional moment that gave him her gracious presence!

He did not — he could not — answer, but he instantly turned and with her on his arm, walked in the

opposite direction. There was too much crowding upon the floor for comfortable walking; mechanically, without intention on his part, he made his way to the entrance to the great conservatory and they passed in.

"I suppose this is the last place I should seek," he said, at last finding speech and scarce knowing what he was saying.

"Why?" she asked archly.

"A soldier, you know, seldom cares to revisit the scene of a reverse," he said.

"I have read somewhere," she answered demurely, "that all great soldiers seek to retrieve a reverse, and Captain Mortimer, it is said, is a great soldier."

"I thank you for the compliment," he answered with some embarrassment; "but I fear you are amusing yourself at my expense."

"One doesn't amuse oneself," she answered gravely, "at the expense of those who wear that Order," and she touched lightly with her gloved finger-tips the Columbia Cross glittering upon his breast. "You must tell me some day the story of how that was won," she continued in a low voice. "I'd like to hear the details from your own lips."

"I fear narration is not my strong point," he answered, again evincing embarrassment. "Besides," he added hastily, "the credit of that affair really belonged most largely to the dearest fellow on earth — my comrade, Ralph Swords."

"I've heard of Captain Swords' connection with that affair," said Dorothy dryly; "but I don't always believe quite all I hear."

"No?"

"No," she replied, "just as people sometimes say things they don't fully mean, I suppose. For instance," she continued with meaning, "indelicate

and careless remarks in the excitement of play at baccarat!"

"Indelicate and careless remarks — baccarat!" he repeated, with evident wonderment. "I realize I am stupid, but I don't understand."

She turned her great eyes upon his face and as she saw the perplexity there her heart gave a joyful leap. Long ago she had to herself fully exonerated him and had pitilessly condemned herself for having ever entertained a single doubt. Now, it seemed, the entire story of the infamous Brooke was a falsehood woven out of whole cloth. Still, with the spirit of inquisition natural to womankind, she determined to probe the entire matter to the bitter end.

"Yes; at baccarat, I said," she answered gayly. "Weren't you with the Tenth before you came to the Guards?"

"Yes," he answered, wondering what was coming next.

"And the Tenth were sorry gamblers, were they not?" she persisted. "Was there not a great deal of baccarat playing toward the close of the season at Oldport?"

"I don't know whether I ought to disclose the secrets of the mess-room," he replied; "but I don't mind admitting what was generally known and talked about. Your information is quite correct, I regret to say."

"You regret?" she asked. "Why? It is rumored that Captain Mortimer was one of the most assiduous devotees."

"Then rumor falsifies," he answered gravely; "for I disapprove upon military grounds of all forms of gambling in military quarters. *I never played baccarat in a regimental mess-room in my life.*"

She gave a little cry of astonishment and joy. Complete, indeed, was this refutation of the tale of the Brooke!

"Why," she exclaimed, with the inconsequence of a true woman, "why did you never tell me this before?"

"Tell you before!" he repeated. "Why should I?"

"Never mind," she answered, panting, "I'm still quite angry with you."

"Angry?" he asked, perturbed. "Why? Because I haven't played baccarat?"

"No, no," she retorted impatiently. "Because you are so credulous."

"Credulous?"

"Yes," she replied petulantly. "What was that interesting story told to you at the last ball regarding a certain lady who shall be nameless? A story which you accepted and believed, I suppose!" she added indignantly.

He stared straight ahead and made no reply.

"Oh, it was told to you in strictest confidence, I presume?" she pouted.

"That which I'm told in confidence I make a point of forgetting I've ever heard," he replied, fencing. "You surely will not blame me?"

"That's doubtless right," she admitted; "but let me say," she added with meaning, "the waters of a certain Brooke may babble not only unceasingly, but also very falsely. Will you bear that in mind if you should remember a certain confidence?"

"You're not angry with me?" he pleaded.

"Very little," she answered; "in fact, so little that you may have the next waltz — if you care for it."

A troubled look came into his face.

"I fear I can't," he replied with disappointment. "I'm on duty and must return at once."

"On duty!" she exclaimed; "why, I understood Captain Swords was on guard to-night?"

"Yes," he replied, "he is; but I'm on special duty — a scouting expedition, I might say."

"A scouting expedition!" she repeated. "You speak as if it were a time of war. Tell me about it."

"I can't," he answered reluctantly. "I am pledged upon honor not to speak of it."

Her blue eyes opened wide in mingled astonishment and concern.

"If there is so much secrecy," she said slowly, "it must be a matter of importance. Is there any danger to — to — you?"

"I could hardly say there is," he answered lightly. "Call it an interesting little adventure — nothing more serious than that."

But she was not lightly to be put aside.

"On your honor, is there no danger?"

"None that I know of," he answered reassuringly.

"That you know of?" she repeated. "Then you can't tell."

"No," he admitted, "the circumstances are so novel — so unusual — I can't tell."

They had reached a secluded part of the great conservatory and stood facing each other, she with downcast eyes, he looking down upon her with rapt admiration.

"I must return," he whispered; "although never did I go to duty so unwillingly."

She took his arm and they walked slowly back toward the ball-room.

"Why so silent?" he whispered to her as they walked.

She sighed.

"I have a foreboding," she answered sadly, "that this undertaking — this secret expedition of which you cannot speak — is one of difficulty and of danger."

"No, no," he answered cheerily; "you're mistaken. But," he added in a low voice, "were it so, would you care?"

For answer, she looked upward and her glance met his. Softly he whispered to her and more softly still came her whispered reply — a reply that brought the light to his eyes and the hot flush of joy to his cheeks.

It was with that light in his eyes, that color in his cheeks, they passed out of the conservatory into the ball-room. Not ten paces from them as they entered stood a man wearing the uniform of the Imperial Guard. As they walked, he looked after them, with black brows bent and an expression in the dark face that was not good to look upon. He turned sharply at a tap from a lady's fan upon his arm, the scowl still upon his face.

"Ah, Lady Brooke!"

"A word with you, Milord Ashley," she said.

He led her aside and they stood for some minutes engaged in conversation.

"I'll do it," he said to her as she was about to pass on. "You may count upon my managing it."

"And you may count upon me," she answered, "to repair matters when the proper time comes. As you are aware, I still have some influence with His Majesty."

Lord Ashley bowed low.

"Repair, eh!" he muttered under his black mustache when she had gone, "if you'll consult the past, Milady, you'll find that when I've finished with those who cross my path, there's little left to repair!

Your suggestion is good, though, Milady! You certainly are a born *intrigante*. An excellent suggestion, indeed! And I'll lose no time in carrying it out!"

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

A last, lingering pressure of the hand, a hasty exit from the ball-room and Captain Mortimer hurried back to his post of duty. He reached the corridor, returned the salutes of the three sentinels as he passed, and went into the antechamber. He stopped for several minutes' conversation with Captain Swords and then made his way to the first door of the Chancellerie suite. A light tap and the door was opened by Kearns.

"Back in good time, I hope!" whispered the Captain.

"In plenty of time," Kearns whispered in return, as he hastily closed the door. "I'm glad you went. It's not very interesting sitting here in the dark, without even the privilege of a comforting cigar. Still, I've had a few experiences of the kind before."

Captain Mortimer removed his sword and stored it away in the air-ship. It was a strict military regulation that officers should appear abroad only in uniform and wearing their swords.

"I'd suggest," he said as he took his seat beside them, "that it might help pass the time if Mr. Kearns would tell us some of the many interesting experiences he doubtless had in his time. The darkness here will lend an additional thrill. What say you, Professor?"

"We'll get enough thrills before we're through with this adventure, provided our friend Kearns'

theory is correct," replied the Professor dryly; "still, if he'll tell a story, I'll be glad to listen."

"No, no;" protested Kearns; "all my interest is centered in that park and in watching for what may come from over those tree-tops. Ah, listen!"

As he spoke there came three faint, but distinct, taps on the door; then a pause, followed by four similar taps.

It was the agreed signal which Captain Swords was to give when the King retired.

"From now on we may expect something," remarked the Professor.

"Interesting but scientifically inaccurate," retorted Kearns. "Before long we may expect, but not just yet. You must allow for some time after the retirement of the King before you can expect any manifestations. It's now fully an hour earlier than the time of the preceding visit."

"Quite so," replied the Professor; "still I'll wager, for all that, you wouldn't care to have us go to sleep during the next hour."

"Right you are," assented Kearns; "one can never be quite sure what may happen. Those fellows, whoever they may be, seem to know pretty well what takes place in the palace. They doubtless have a confederate, or confederates, on the inside."

"You think so?" said Captain Mortimer. "Have you made any efforts to discover?"

"None whatever," answered Kearns. "I've been too busy with other matters. I'm after the main quarry. The subordinate details, if necessary, can be attended to later."

This seemed sound reasoning and neither of the others ventured a reply. The moments slowly passed. They sat there in the darkness exchanging only occasional whispers. They heard the chime of

one of the palace clocks — an hour had passed and still nothing. Again the clock chimed; it was the quarter. The sound had barely died away in the darkness of the summer night, when Kearns laid a light touch upon the Professor's arm.

"*At last!*"

The three bent their heads together.

"Look upward — to the right!" came the low whisper.

They strained their eyes in the direction indicated. Faintly seen in the darkness was a shadowy something, the outline of some black object floating in the air.

"Steady!" whispered Kearns, in an ever so faint whisper. "Not a move till I give the word!"

The dark object, though still indistinct, became gradually more clearly outlined. It crossed at some little distance out and above their window, passed the windows of the King's apartment and was lost to their view opposite the window of the antechamber where the King's officer on duty kept guard.

"An air-ship — an air-ship, sure enough," whispered the Professor. "And apparently painted dead black."

"Quite so," replied Kearns, "but this time we'll match your gray one against the black. Great Scott! To think that I'm not in the race."

Several minutes passed and the ship did not reappear.

"My God!" exclaimed Captain Mortimer, "you haven't allowed them to escape us?"

"Hush, no!" answered Kearns; "do not fear. They're cute ones. They're scouting and 'll surely return."

The whispered words had hardly left his lips when

the air-ship reappeared. This time it halted in a line with the King's window.

"Steady and quiet!" said Kearns. "The time has come."

Quickly, silently they rose and took their positions in the air-ship, as it lay upon its rests. Stealthily Kearns crept to the window and with one turn of the well-oiled and carefully prepared machinery, the entire bay window curved outward, leaving a wide opening. Through this gap, the launch-like air-ship skilfully guided by the Professor, gracefully slid into the night. Rapid as had been these movements, they were not more rapid than those of the attacking party. As the window flew back and the prow of the air-ship passed out, the Professor and Mortimer saw them loosen their mooring, turn about and away. By the time the opening had been cleared, the pursued were several lengths in the lead, but the royal air-ship was following hot in their wake.

High over the tree-tops of the park they flew and on and on until they reached the river. Thus far they had maintained their respective distances, neither apparently gaining or losing.

"Turn on the flash-light!" called out the Professor, "or we may lose them in the darkness."

An instant later a bright stream of light shot forth from the prow of the "Royal Dean," flooding with its radiance the pursued.

Captain Mortimer and the Professor saw that the craft before them was slightly larger than their own, of a dead black color and contained three men.

"Ahoy, there!" came a moment later the hail from the pursued. "Who are you? What company do you belong to?"

Captain Mortimer rose to his feet.

"Halt!" he commanded.

At sight of his uniform in the glare of the searchlight, there seemed to be a sudden consternation among the pursued. Their air-ship shot upward to greater heights. Instantly the Professor handled his levers and followed. A hurried conference between the pursued seemed to be taking place.

Captain Mortimer picked up a repeating rifle from the floor of the air-ship.

"Surrender!" he shouted, his voice ringing strong and clear; "surrender, you rebels, in the name of the King!"

No attention was given to this summons. The pursued kept steadily on, heading toward the north.

"Halt!" again commanded Captain Mortimer, raising his rifle. "Halt, or I fire!"

For answer to this, a man appeared in the stern of the pursued bearing before him a bowed shield. From the ease with which he handled it, it was apparently very light but doubtless strong enough to withstand a bullet. There was a steel projection at the base of this shield and, in the light of the flashlight, they saw him drop this projection into a socket. The shield was thus held in place and the occupants of the air-ship protected from any pistol, or rifle fire, from the rear.

It was a revelation to the pursuers. The attacking party was not only furnished as an aërial scout, but was furthermore equipped as a species of armored aërial cruiser. The Professor drew his companion's attention to this fact.

"Yes," answered Captain Mortimer, "and if they were supplied with means of offense, such as repeating rifles, they would be not only an aërial cruiser, but a very effective aërial man-of-war. Do you think there's any vital part of their craft, so that I could disable them with a bullet?"

"Our craft could not be so disabled," answered the Professor; "neither, so far as I can judge, could theirs be."

"Then we must flank them," said Captain Mortimer, "and try to bring them to terms in that way."

"Very well," answered the Professor; "I'll see what I can do."

He accordingly endeavored to navigate his craft to a position on their left quarter, but the pursued were wary and quickly shifted, keeping the protecting shield between themselves and the pursuers. At last, by clever manœuvering, the Professor had almost succeeded, when up went another shield, effectually protecting a large section of that quarter.

"It's no use," exclaimed Mortimer, laying down the rifle; "it's a veritable armored cruiser. No matter what quarter we flank them on, they undoubtedly have enough shields to protect all sides. By heaven! they seem to be drawing away from us."

"Yes; they've certainly increased the distance between us somewhat," assented the Professor, "but they're not as far away as they were a few minutes ago. I don't understand it. They seem to gain and then we seem to creep up on them a little. Perhaps this may be due to certain effects of the air currents, but it is decidedly peculiar."

Captain Mortimer made no reply. He sat watching the pursued craft, distinctly outlined in the rays of the flash-light. On and on they rushed at topmost speed through the yielding air, grown raw and chilly. The first streaks of light began to flicker in the east. The pursued now rose to still greater altitudes, until the air became uncomfortably rarified. The Professor manipulated his levers and the pursuers followed.

"What are they up to now?" asked Captain Mortimer. "Trying to dodge us?"

"Perhaps," answered the Professor. "It looks more to me as if they were trying to keep out of sight of land as the daylight comes."

"Any chance of our giving out?"

"No; we can keep this up for many hours yet."

"And they?"

"I don't know. Judging from the qualities they have shown so far, it's best to assume they are fully as well equipped as we."

"What are the prospects of overtaking them?"

"Not very favorable, I should say," replied the Professor. "We've been going at our topmost ever since we started and yet we haven't gained upon them. In fact, they've gained a trifle on us. You see, they are somewhat larger and probably have more power. As it is, I am astonished we haven't lost them before now."

"What's the likelihood of our losing them altogether?"

"I can't say," replied the Professor, "but our chances against losing them improve every minute as the light comes on. We'll soon be able to at least keep them in sight for a very great distance. You may shut off the flash-light now."

"There's nothing you can suggest?"

"Nothing," answered the Professor. "Under existing conditions, there are only two courses open to us."

"And they are?"

"Either to keep on as we are doing, or give it up as a bad job."

"Give up!" exclaimed Mortimer in a disgusted tone. "I'm unalterably opposed to that. We started

out to follow them, and follow them we will until either this air-ship gives out or we overtake them."

"Or we lose sight of them," suggested the Professor.

"Or we lose sight of them," assented Mortimer grudgingly; "but I trust you'll do your best to avoid that."

"You may count upon it that I will," answered the Professor stoutly.

"Besides," continued Mortimer, "they can't keep this up forever. They're making for some point and some time or other they must effect a landing. Then it will become interesting. Hello! what are they up to now?"

"They are descending. See! they are increasing the distance between us, too."

"If they descend, it will give me a chance to pot them from above," suggested the Captain, again taking up the rifle.

"It seems awful to fire upon them," exclaimed the Professor wistfully; "especially as they are not offering us any attack, but are only seeking to escape."

"Fire upon them!" cried Mortimer warmly; "I may fire, but I have certainly no intention of hitting them. I would, though, send the bullets sufficiently close to make matters look serious and possibly stop them. But to shoot men in cold blood — never! I am an American soldier, sir, of the twentieth century and we've nothing in common, thank God! with the assassins of your day — the butchers of Little Knee and the murderers of gallant Sitting Bull."

"Sitting Bull!" exclaimed Professor Dean, with astonishment, "so he has passed down in history as one of the legendary heroes and a reproach to the men of my day."

"Very decidedly," answered Mortimer. "You

should read Goodrow's history on the subject and Krebiel's noble poem, 'The Death of Sitting Bull.'"

"History is certainly a strange thing," commented the Professor. "Argument is somewhat difficult at this altitude; besides, I've these pesky levers to look after. I should like to take up that subject with you later, though. By the way, do they still play a game called 'poker' these days?"

"My dear Professor," answered Mortimer, "the American game of poker is immortal."

"And they still bluff at the game?"

"Probably more so than ever."

"You'll not have an opportunity of trying the bluff you spoke of," said the Professor, as he nodded toward the pursued. "See the protecting shield go up."

Mortimer looked and saw a shield had been so adjusted as to at least partially protect the air-ship from an attack from above.

"A cunning set!" commented Mortimer.

"That's what our friend Kearns said they were," replied the Professor. "I suppose we had best follow them and return toward earth."

Again the Professor juggled with his levers and they shot rapidly downward.

"There's something else going on there," remarked Mortimer as he eyed the pursued. "What is it?"

They had descended many hundreds of feet. A number of mountain tops, apparently forming part of an extensive range, were more or less indistinctly outlined below.

"Mountains?" commented the Professor.

"Yes," said Mortimer, "and from the general lay of the land I should say the heart of the Adirondacks. But what are they doing there?" he inquired eagerly, pointing to the pursued, who were

manœuvering with some instrument projecting over one of their quarters.

The Professor watched closely for some minutes.

"It's some signaling instrument," he said at last. "They are signaling the land."

BOOK III

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

CHAPTER I

"WHO ARE YOU"

The movements of the pursued craft, which Professor Dean described as signals, continued for only a short time and then once more the pursued rose to a great altitude. The "Royal Dean" tenaciously followed.

"I thought we were going back to earth, but now it seems that we are heaven-bound," remarked the Professor.

"Whether they make for heaven or the other place, we'll follow them as long as there is a follow left in us," answered Mortimer grimly.

For some twenty miles the mysterious craft kept its way, then, still at the same altitude, suddenly described a great semicircle, and laid a course due south.

"What are they up to now?" questioned Mortimer.

"Blessed if I know," replied the Professor. "It looks very much as if we were going back the way we came.

"Curious!" commented Mortimer. "I suppose we can only follow and await developments."

"That's all," assented the Professor.

The opinion expressed by Professor Dean that they were returning over practically the same course proved to be correct. Back they went for some twenty miles, and then the pursued began to descend, followed, of course, by their obstinate pursuers.

The occupants of "The Royal Dean" perceived they were dropping into a great valley, shut in on all sides by towering mountain tops.

"It seems we are to make a landing at last," remarked Mortimer, scanning the valley beneath.

There was no reply to this remark. Mortimer turned leisurely to address the Professor again, but was startled to see the latter staring with dilated eyes into space.

"See!" he gasped. "There! Ah, and there!"

Mortimer looked in the direction indicated and was dumbfounded to perceive to the westward, slightly above them, another air-ship bearing down.

"Look over there!" exclaimed the Professor, pointing to the East.

Mortimer shifted his glance to another air-ship. An instant later two more appeared, the one to the North and the other, beyond the line of the pursued air-ship, to the South.

"We're surrounded," gasped the Professor, amazed. "What'll we do? Try to escape? I fear, though, it will be useless, judging from the speed which I see they develop."

"Useless or not," replied Mortimer obstinately, "we started out to follow that air-ship and follow it we will to the bitter end."

Even as they spoke, the four air-ships were rapidly closing in upon them and they could see that they were several times the size of the "Royal Dean" and that they carried a number of men. As they

drew nearer, they saw what appeared to be miniature cannon protruding from their quarters. An instant later the air-ship to the West came within hailing distance. A man stepped to the prow and shouted something which they did not clearly hear.

"They evidently want to speak to us," said Dean, and he slowed down and came to a stop.

The air-ship to the West also checked its speed, but still kept slowly approaching. The other three air-ships were fast closing in.

"Why did you stop?" asked Mortimer with some annoyance. "We don't want to let those fellows get away from us." He nodded in the direction of the pursued.

"No fear," answered the Professor. "They are descending straight into the valley."

"Hello!" shouted Mortimer to the air-ship to the West.

"Hello!" came back the answer. "Who are you?"

"His Majesty's air-ship, the "Royal Dean," replied Mortimer, adding with an aside and a chuckle to the Professor: "How's that?"

The reply appeared to exercise a strange effect upon the men addressed. The man in the bow turned to those behind him and a brief parley seemed to ensue. Finally he turned about and again hailed them.

"You are our prisoners!" he shouted.

"Prisoners!" roared back Mortimer. "By what authority do you dare thus address an officer of the King's Guard?"

All four air-ships had now drawn quite close and had come to a stop. All were drifting in the air currents.

"Authority!" called back the spokesman. "You'll learn that later. Surrender!"

Mortimer was standing in the extreme bow of the air-ship. He turned to his companion.

"Professor, hand me that rifle."

Professor Dean bent forward and picked up the rifle from the floor of the air-ship. As he rose with the weapon in his hand there came a warning shout from the spokesman.

"Fire one shot," he cried, "and we will blow you to the moon!"

"You scoundrels!" called back Mortimer, "try it!" And he turned to the Professor, holding out his hand for the rifle.

The Professor calmly drew back and dropped it over the side of the air-ship.

"What have you done — what have you done?" cried Mortimer furiously.

"Saved you from yourself!" replied his companion coolly. "I don't mind your fighting when you have half a chance, but to resist here is sheer madness."

Captain Mortimer paused an instant, hesitatingly.

"I suppose you're entitled to some consideration in this matter," he said sulkily. "There may be some truth in what you say. Perhaps I can best aid the cause I serve by exercising diplomacy for the moment and biding my time."

"Now you're talking concentrated sense," replied the Professor. "That's the proper way to look at it."

As he spoke, the air-ship on either side had drawn close in upon them. Each of these air-ships threw out a long, powerful prong, resembling a giant boat-hook, and held "The Royal Dean" securely. Words of command rang out and an instant later the two air-

ships began descending at moderate speed to the valley below, drawing down the captive craft between them. Mortimer picked up his sword and buckled it about his waist. The Professor was silent. Both stood in their respective positions, expectant and alert but offering no further resistance.

They reached the bottom of the valley and gently grounded upon tufted grass. As they did so, the captives glanced about and saw that they were surrounded by a number of rough-looking men, who had evidently been awaiting the landing. They also saw with some astonishment that in the forward rank stood a young woman, jauntily attired in a natty hunting costume. A short skirt of some dark material fell over a pair of high-laced russet shoes and a pert red feather peeped forth from the saucy little hat which covered her short black curls. As she stood watching the captives, her cheeks flushed with excitement and her black eyes sparkling, she presented a remarkably pretty picture of a brunette of the slender, sinuous type.

There were hurried exclamations, greetings and questions — addressed by the men on the ground to the men in the arriving air-ships. The answers seemed to cause considerable perturbation and excitement. At a word of command two men stepped forward and seized Captain Mortimer roughly by the shoulders.

In an instant he had shaken them off, and with two smashing blows sent them sprawling to the ground.

"I surrender," he said; "not to you, you scum; to the lady!"

And he raised his hand in military salute.

One of the men struck lay on the ground, apparently stunned, but the other sprang to his feet with an oath. His hand flew to the back of his belt and out

flashed a long, ugly-looking knife. Mortimer sprang lightly over the quarter, set his back against the side of the airship and drew his sword. A murmur — half-angry, half-excited — went up from the surrounding groups of men. At the prospect of a fight their curiosity and interest were whetted. The man with the knife crouched as if seeking an opportunity to spring in and attack, while Mortimer stood coolly on the defensive, a half smile upon his face, as he watched the man's awkward points.

At this juncture the girl turned and hastily whispered to a tall, rawboned man who had just climbed out of one of the capturing air-ships. He instantly broke through the ranks and came forward.

"Back, Jackson," he cried to the man with the knife; "quit now!"

"He hit me," replied the man, with a savage growl, "and I'm going to rip him up. Out o' the way, Cap'n."

"It looks as if two could play at that game," replied the man addressed as Captain, with a grin. "Back, I say. This man is a prisoner and goes before the Colonel."

With some hesitancy the man sheathed his knife and slunk back among his fellows.

"Follow me!" said the Captain to Mortimer; "and you, too," he added, nodding to the Professor.

The latter clambered over the side of the air-ship.

"I'm ready," he said.

"But I don't know whether I am," cried Mortimer, still standing sword in hand. "Who are you? A military organization, or a band of outlaws? I hear you speak of captains and colonels! And by what authority do you talk of prisoners?"

"I can't answer your questions," replied the other,

civilly enough; "but if you follow me, you'll perhaps learn all you want to know."

"Diplomacy!" whispered the Professor. "Let me again urge diplomacy."

"Very well," said Mortimer, sheathing his sword; "let's see this farce through to the end."

They accordingly fell in on either side of their conductor, who led the way for some little distance down the valley, abruptly turning to the right into a broad, deep cañon. Packed in the cañon in long rows and heaps were what appeared to be quantities of stores covered with huge tarpaulins. Here and there were large, cave-like openings in the sides of the hill, with men passing in and out. It was evidently an extensive encampment and these cave-like openings either led into quarters for the men, or were storing places for more material.

The most astonishing spectacle of all presented itself at the further end of the cañon, where a big, roughly-built, black-bearded man, dressed in buckskin and broad-brimmed felt hat, a leather belt about his waist and drawn sword in hand, was drilling a squad of men. A short distance away was a large tent, with a smaller one on either side.

As soon as he perceived the three approaching, the man in command of the squad gave an order to a subordinate and advanced toward them. He stopped when some twenty paces away and motioned to the man in charge of the two prisoners to approach. The latter did so and in a low tone made his report, whereupon the leader turned abruptly upon his heel and made his way to the central tent. The man who had been conducting Mortimer and Dean returned to them.

"You're to go before the Colonel," he said.

"The Colonel!" exclaimed Mortimer, with a

guffaw. "Colonel of what? May I inquire what regiment this is?"

"Ask that of the Colonel," was the answer.

"At least tell us the name of this Colonel?"

Their conductor hesitated a moment.

"You may call him Colonel Henry," he said.

"And you? You bear the rank of Captain, it seems. How may we address you?"

"I am second in command here and you may call me Captain Robert."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Mortimer with sarcasm; "an un-uniformed body of men, whose officers all seem to be known by their first names. I'll be much interested to discover the nature of this organization."

"Traitors are apt to turn up in every cause," was the grave answer, "although this cause has never known one so far. Hence it's wise to take every precaution."

"Cause — what cause?" inquired Mortimer.

"No more questions, please," answered Captain Robert. "I bear you no ill-will and I want to give you a word of friendly advice. Speak to the Colonel softly and civilly. He's a hard man at times and it will be well to remember you are in his power."

Mortimer was about to reply, but the Professor hastily interposed.

"I take your advice in the spirit in which it is given," he said, "and I thank you."

Captain Robert led the way to the central tent, ushered in his two prisoners and retired. As he did so, a squad of six men, armed with rifles, fell into line behind Dean and Mortimer. The latter found themselves confronted with Colonel Henry, who was seated before a large table facing the entrance to the tent.

"Your names," he asked curtly, with a scowl.

"I'm Captain Mortimer, of the Imperial Guard, and this is Professor Dean," was Mortimer's reply. "Who are you?"

"Since when have prisoners taken to doing the questioning?" asked the other, with an ugly sneer.

"Prisoners!" retorted Mortimer, scornfullly, "to whom — to what authority?"

"Yes, prisoners!" was the answer with rising fury, "and if you've any doubt on that score, I'll soon convince you of the fact."

He paused a moment and calmed himself with an effort.

"You are prisoners," he continued, "just as the rest of the Imperial Guard will be soon — prisoners or dead."

Captain Mortimer laughed derisively. Trained in the roughness of service in camp and field, he was no great adept in the milder methods of diplomacy and the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

"Since when did you escape from safe-keeping?" he asked contemptuously.

Henry rose to his feet, his face flushed with anger.

"You may laugh," he cried, "but what I say is true. They'll all be prisoners, or dead!"

Mortimer shrugged his shoulders, with the air of a man who declines to pursue an utterly nonsensical proposition further.

"Enough,'" exclaimed Henry. "What I want to know is where you got that air-ship?"

"That's for you to find out," replied Mortimer.

"And I will," retorted Henry, with growing anger. "That air-ship was stolen from one of our camps. There's been a traitor somewhere and that traitor I propose to discover."

"Yes?"

"Yes; if I have to drag the secret out of you by main force."

"You certainly stand an excellent chance of doing it!" sneered Mortimer. "This much I'll tell you, though, so that no innocent person may possibly come under suspicion: The air-ship is not stolen property. It was built by an honest man and is the property of His Majesty, the King."

A look of mingled astonishment, incredulity and anger came into Henry's face as Mortimer spoke. At the closing words he startled perceptibly.

"You lie!" he cried.

Quick as a flash of light, Mortimer's long, sinewy arm shot across the table and closed upon the other's throat. Henry was a big, strongly-built man, but struggle as he would he could not free himself from that vise-like grasp. Over went table and chair, and back they staggered to the side of the tent, Mortimer's death-like grip neither shaken nor loosened. In an instant Henry's men recovered from the first shock of surprise and the whole file rushed in to the rescue of their chief. The shouts of the men and the sounds of strife reached the outside of the tent and other men, headed by Captain Robert, rushed in and lent their aid. The struggle was sharp but brief and, overborne by numbers, Mortimer was finally dragged away, a stout rope wound about his arms. Dean, too, they seized and secured.

Henry had been thrown down in the struggle. He rose to his feet, black in the face and gasping, and staggered against the side of the tent, his hands pressed to his throat. Some of the men stood bunched around Mortimer, to restrain any further outbreak; others busied themselves picking up the various articles scattered around the floor in the struggle. Recovered somewhat from the fearful choking,

Henry walked across the tent, his face working with anger. He confronted Mortimer, standing bound amid his captors.

"Curse you!"

And he struck the prisoner with his open hand full across the face.

The blow was a heavy one and would have taken a weaker man off his feet. A great shiver of rage convulsed Mortimer's powerful frame, he strained furiously at his bonds and his blue eyes blazed with fury as he glared into the dark face of his opponent.

"You hound! Should we ever meet face to face, you'll pay for that with your life!" he muttered between his teeth.

A furious retort was upon the lips of Henry, when Captain Robert abruptly interposed.

"You dare to interfere!" cried Henry, beside himself.

"No, but—" and Captain Robert whispered, his face close to that of his chief. The bystanders caught only the words "treatment of prisoners," "general orders" and "High President."

"Enough!" broke in Henry, with a violent effort keeping down his rage. "Take him away. I'll deal with him later. Take him away, I say, before I kill him where he stands!"

CHAPTER II

VALERIE SEEKS NEWS OF THE FASHIONS

Captain Robert lost no time in carrying out the order thus received to remove the prisoners. Placing himself between them, he marched from the tent and hurried down the cañon.

"I warned you to take matters quietly," he said reproachfully. "Yet you seem to have acted like a keg of explosives from the moment you got inside the tent."

"I wish I could find myself face to face with that scoundrel, man to man, for a few minutes!" retorted Mortimer. "Oh, for a company of the Guards at my back at this moment and I'd soon teach that fellow and those behind him here a lesson. Prisoners or dead he said they would be shortly. I'd show him that these same Guards were very much alive!"

"Prisoners or dead, eh?" repeated Robert. "Did he tell you that?"

"Yes," answered Mortimer impatiently.

"He spoke only the truth," said Robert solemnly.

Dean started. This was the second time within a few minutes he had heard this declaration and the man who now uttered it spoke earnestly and with conviction. In Mortimer the words created nothing save irritation and impatience. The idea of a body of bandits, or other ruffians, talking of annihilating the famous Guards — one of the crack regiments of the world. It was too preposterous!

"Are you afflicted, too?" he asked with contempt.

"But never mind that! What's this body of men here? We are at least entitled to know to whom we are prisoners."

They had come to the end of the cañon and had reached the main valley. Robert led in sharp turn to the right and kept along parallel with the base of the mountain.

"I may not answer your questions," he replied, "but unless I am much mistaken, there will shortly arrive here one high in authority with whom you will talk. This air-ship of yours must be reported at once. It is the most momentous thing which could have happened."

"Why so? And who is this one high in authority of whom you speak?" asked Mortimer.

Robert parried his question with the query:

"Suppose you tell me where you got your air-ship? Did you secure it from one of our camps?"

"That ruffian back there has already asked me that," replied Mortimer, "and I told him that it wasn't stolen, as he seemed to think, from any of your people, but was the legitimate property of His Majesty, the King."

"Then it was sold to the royalists by some renegade of our party," exclaimed Robert excitedly.

"Not at all," replied Mortimer. "There you're quite wrong.

"Who built it, then? Have you any more such ships?" continued Robert with the same avidity.

"Steady, now!" replied Mortimer, smiling at the other's eagerness. "You're not particularly liberal in the matter of information and we're not generous, either," he added with sarcasm, "after the treatment we have experienced here."

"For that," replied Robert humbly, "I ask your pardon in my behalf and in behalf of many others

here who will learn and not approve of what has been done. The Colonel is a hard man — a brutal man, if you will — but a highly capable one. Hence he is in command here. Blood will have to be shed so that our cause may prevail, but the great mass of us are, I may truly say, opposed to any unnecessary violence."

"You speak strangely," said Mortimer.

"Perhaps it may so seem to you," replied Robert, "but it's nevertheless true. When the hour comes we shall strike, to the full extent that may be necessary, but not one step beyond that. Those are the orders — the orders of the High President."

"The High President!" exclaimed Mortimer, coming to a dead stop. "Ah! I see — I see! I've heard that title before. This — this — camp is a camp of Reactionists and you — you — you — are rebels — conspirators against the King!"

"Hush!" said Robert warningly.

"You deny it!" cried Mortimer.

"I affirm or deny nothing!" replied Robert. "I've already said too much. Come, let us move on." He touched Mortimer lightly on the arm.

They walked a short distance further on down the valley, to a large circular opening between the mountains, where a singular sight confronted them. In that great circular valley, moored to right and left, like shipping in a harbor, lay some two dozen airships of varying sizes. In the foremost rank were the four great ships which had effected their capture, and nestling behind these four was their own craft, the "Royal Dean." Here and there men at work were moving about among the ships.

Silently they stared for a moment upon the scene before them.

"I would much like to inspect some of these," whispered Dean to Robert. "May I?"

"I hardly think I have authority to grant you that privilege," replied Robert, smiling, "but *your* ship will doubtless be subjected to very careful scrutiny by us. By the way, is there anything about it that requires attention for the moment?"

"Nothing," replied Dean; "everything is automatically controlled and it can remain as it is for a month without injury."

"Did you take part in fitting it up?" asked Robert curiously.

"For any and all information," replied Dean, with a laugh, "I must refer you to Captain Mortimer."

Robert good-naturedly joined in the laugh against himself and led the way on board one of the larger air-ships. This air-ship was supplied with quite a spacious cabin and into this cabin Robert showed his prisoners, unbinding the ropes which confined their arms.

"This will have to be your dungeon cell for the present," he said, with a wave of the hand around the cabin, "and I think you will agree it might be worse. For my part, I'll do all in my power to make you as comfortable as possible. We have a very fair commissariat department, I think you'll find, and I'll at least see to it that you're well looked after in that direction. My quarters are quite close to yours and whatever is prepared for my daughter and myself you shall share."

"Your daughter," repeated Mortimer. "Was that the lady whom we saw when we landed?"

"Yes," replied Robert; "my only child. The organization here sought me because of my knowledge of mechanics which rendered me useful in connection with these air-ships. I would never have consented to come, though, if it had meant separation

from my girl, so they agreed to her coming with me. She's a great favorite here. They call her 'The Daughter of the Regiment.' But, while I am talking away to you, I expect you are pretty hungry."

"I confess to experiencing a sense of vacuum," said the Professor.

"I'm as hungry as a bear," said Mortimer.

"Then your wants in that respect shall be quickly supplied," replied Robert cheerily. "In the meantime you'll forgive me, I know, if I secure this door on the outside and put a man on guard. That's the usual military process, I believe, Captain?"

"Very well," answered Mortimer, with a laugh. "I promise you not to escape during the next hour — not until after breakfast."

"And your sword," said Robert, glancing at the scabbard which hung by Mortimer's side. "I suppose, according to strict military rule, I ought to demand that you give it up."

Mortimer's face darkened.

"I served through the Russian war," he said, "and was never taken prisoner. To yield up my sword would be a new experience to me. I'll yield it to none here, and those who would have it must take it by force."

"Well," answered Robert in a conciliatory tone, "we needn't quarrel over that. We hold you securely enough here as it is and can afford to leave you your sword."

With these words, he stepped from the cabin, secured the door on the outside and the two prisoners were alone. Instinctively they turned and faced each other.

"A pretty mess we've made of it!" exclaimed Mortimer, with a laugh. "We started out to capture

those fellows and here they've turned the tables and captured us. A nice little ambuscade we've walked, or rather flown, into. The worst of it, too, is that I thought it was only a night's work and I didn't even get leave of absence from the Guard — all of which is quite an infraction of military discipline."

"And I," bewailed the Professor, "what a mess I've made of it! Never once in the excitement of the chase did I think of using the aërestograph to communicate with our friend Kearns. You see, I was kept pretty busy handling the air-ship and keeping watch on the movements of the fellows in front of us. Still, I suppose I ought to have managed to send him a message or two."

"Not at all," replied Mortimer; "you were not to blame. Up to the moment of our capture what news was there to send? We were every moment awaiting developments."

"And when those developments occurred," remarked the Professor dryly, "it was no longer in our power to send messages."

"Quite so," assented Mortimer, "but all that happened was so utterly unlooked for that we could hardly have been expected to foresee it. Those who are disposed to criticise may be reminded of the old axiom that foresight is never equal to hindsight."

"Quite true," answered the Professor, "but what can you suggest as the best way out of our present position? What shall we do?"

There was a sound at the door, as of someone at work on the outer fastenings.

"Nothing — until after breakfast," replied Mortimer. "Ah, here it comes, I think — and welcome."

As he spoke the door opened and there appeared, at the head of the steps leading down into the cabin, the graceful figure of a girl carrying a large tray

substantially laden with food. At a glance they recognized her as she whom they had seen upon landing.

Professor Dean rose and bowed.

"Miss Robert, I believe?" said Captain Mortimer, also rising and bowing.

The girl deposited her heavy tray, ran over to a locker and procured a white tablecloth which she spread upon the table.

"Yes," she replied, with a merry laugh, "but here in the camp they call me 'Valerie.'"

And she turned a pair of merry brown eyes upon them, eyes that rested with evident admiration on Mortimer's jaunty military jacket, with its gay trappings. As she stood there smiling, with her high color, her jet-black hair, her graceful figure, and large but very white teeth showing between her full, scarlet lips, she was unquestionably a very pretty girl.

"Valerie," repeated Mortimer, gallantly. "That is certainly a very pretty name, but a rather uncommon one in this country."

"Yes," assented Valerie, still laughing, as she busied herself with the table; "I suppose it is. My mother was French and I was named after her. They tell me you come direct from the palace," she prattled on. "Are any of the ladies there called Valerie?"

"I think not," replied Mortimer, joining in her merry mood. "It would be hard, even at Court, to find a name as pretty as that."

"And is it true that the ladies are wearing dresses cut in Directoire style?" continued Valerie.

Mortimer broke into a hearty laugh.

"Really," he said, "I am not competent to answer that. Perhaps," he added mischievously, "my friend Professor Dean, who takes a great interest

in the ladies, can inform you upon that subject."

Thus appealed to, the Professor fairly blushed.

"Well," he stammered confusedly, "I don't know much about ladies' dresses, but it is true that the fashions have reverted to something like that which was in vogue some two centuries ago and the ladies at the Court to-day are wearing dresses which suggest those of the days of the French *Directoire.*"

"There!" exclaimed Mortimer triumphantly. "You see he is an authority and I referred you to the right source for information."

"It must be a very pretty fashion," remarked the girl musingly. "How I would like to see those dresses — and the Court and the ladies there! What a pity it seems that a Court is wicked and must be done away with."

"What makes you think the Court is wicked?" asked Mortimer curiously.

"Oh," replied the girl, "I have always been taught that. Everybody here says it is. But I am keeping you from your breakfast," she added, hastily.

"Not at all," protested Mortimer and the Professor together. "Pray stay."

"No; I must go," she replied regretfully. "I was specially told I must not talk much to you and if I stay too long, father will suspect and not let me come again, and," she added with a saucy smile and a final admiring glance at Mortimer's uniform, as she fled up the steps, "I *want* to come again."

As the door closed behind her the Professor turned to Mortimer.

"They say that every woman is at heart a royalist and I verily believe this very attractive young woman has a leaning that way."

"The saying is a very true one," replied Mortimer. "From what little I have read and observed

on the subject, I should say that the women — God bless them! — had much to do, by indirect but nevertheless powerful influence, with the formation of the monarchy, and womankind to-day is to be reckoned as one of the staunchest supports of the throne."

And with this summary of the situation, he turned with interest to the breakfast before them.

They spent the remainder of the morning and afternoon in arguing over various measures and plans of escape. There was a sentinel, they knew, constantly on duty outside the cabin door, and should they break out and confront this man there were doubtless plenty of his comrades at hand to come to his assistance before an escape could be made. From what little they had seen of the valley they had perceived that it was apparently enclosed on all sides by high, precipitous mountains, which would take much time and effort to scale and would afford excellent opportunities for pursuit and recapture. Any clumsy and unsuccessful effort at escape would naturally lead to greater vigilance on the part of their captors. They were both agreed that they must be patient for the moment and watch for some favorable opportunity before venturing an attempt.

Their dinner was brought them by Valerie, who stayed longer than before, chatting gayly and coquetting at a lively rate with Mortimer. After dinner they received a visit from Captain Robert, who came with a bundle under his arm.

"I cannot offer you cigars," he said, "for there is a shortage of those luxuries here, but I can give you some excellent tobacco." He took the bundle from under his arm and laid upon the table some long clay pipes and a stone jar filled with tobacco.

"There's a great consumption of pipes among our

people," he said, "and we manufacture these ourselves — both the long and the short variety."

The Professor smiled.

"You seem to have extensive facilities for various kinds of manufacturing," he remarked with meaning.

Captain Robert laughed outright.

"I'm not going to give you any information on that point," he said, "but I can tell you something of interest."

"Yes?"

"The news of your capture and of your air-ship," continued Captain Robert, "has been forwarded to headquarters and it seems to have made, as I predicted, quite a stir."

"Ah! is that all!" answered the Professor, with some disappointment.

"By no means," replied Robert. "A certain important personage is on his way here. To-morrow you will receive a visit."

"From whom?" inquired Dean curiously.

The other dropped his voice to a whisper:

"From the High President himself!"

CHAPTER III

THE MASKED VISITOR

It was close upon noon on the following day when Captain Robert presented himself before the prisoners. He was eager and excited.

"Are you ready to receive the visit I spoke of last night?" he asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mortimer, with a slight show of interest, "is His Mightiness, your famous High President, here?"

"Yes," replied Robert; "he arrived just before daylight and has been busy during the morning around the camp."

"Arrived before daylight!" repeated Mortimer. "Your High President is an early traveler."

"Those who come to this camp," answered Robert gravely, "invariably arrive before daylight. I don't think I'll betray any very special information if I tell you in confidence that he was picked up at a distant point from here and arrived by air-ship."

"That's just what I surmised when you first spoke," said Dean quickly.

"Then your surmise was quite correct," replied Robert. "He arrived and he will leave by air-ship. Are you ready to receive him?"

Mortimer and the Professor both assented and Robert started for the cabin steps. But he stopped and again turned to them.

"I know nothing definitely," he said, "but I strongly suspect the interview you are about to hold

will be a most important one. I have your welfare at heart. I beg you to receive the High President in the right spirit and to give due heed to his words."

"I thank you," said the Professor appreciatively.

"And I thank you," exclaimed Mortimer, "but I've already had one unpleasant experience here. Your High President shall be received by us with due consideration and we will listen carefully to whatever he may have to say to us, provided the manner and language adopted are such as may be properly tolerated by a gentleman of the high scientific attainments of my friend, Professor Dean, and myself, as an officer of His Majesty, the King."

"Ah," exclaimed Robert enthusiastically, "you need have no fear on that score. Don't for a moment compare the High President with anyone you have seen here. The High President is a man of the highest culture and of the highest calibre. He is the most God-like man who has lived since the days of Washington — a leader gifted with genius for organization, a patriot who seeks nothing except for his countrymen; brave, enterprising, resourceful, merciless when the occasion demands it, yet with a heart full of love for humanity — such is our High President. He will go down to posterity as the greatest patriot and leader of men of the centuries."

Robert's eyes blazed with enthusiasm as he spoke and his manner was full of earnestness.

"We will bear your words in mind," said the Professor. "He is doubtless very worthy, since you estimate him so highly."

"And you — what say you?" asked Robert, turning questioningly to Mortimer.

"I can hardly be expected to subscribe to your views," answered Mortimer coldly, "inasmuch as I have reason to suspect the person to whom you refer

to be engaged in an organized and armed rebellion against the government and to be an enemy to the King."

Robert stood for a moment looking sadly into Mortimer's face and then, without another word, withdrew.

Some ten minutes later the door again opened and looking up they saw Robert. He stepped back, opened the door to its fullest extent and there appeared a man tall of stature and of massive physique. With movements which were remarkably rapid for one of such giant proportions, he passed down the cabin steps and stood before them.

Both Mortimer and Dean looked up with a start of astonishment.

Their visitor was masked.

"Greeting!" he exclaimed, as he stood facing them, using the common form of salutation of the day. Long ago the Professor had duly noted that the comparatively meaningless "Good-morning!" and "Good-day!" of the olden times had passed into disuse; as had also that almost pathetic expression at parting: "Good-bye!" They were as obsolete as the "Good-morrow!" of the eighteenth century. People now said "Greeting!" or "Salutations!" or "I salute you!" when they met and "Re-meeting!" when they parted — thereby intending to courteously convey the idea that they looked forward with anticipation and pleasure to again meeting the person from whom they were taking leave. "To our joyous re-meeting!" Surely a happier salutation than the old-time sad "Good-bye!"

"We greet you!" responded Mortimer, in turn using the customary form of salutation.

"I trust you have been well cared for," continued

the visitor, "and that your detention has been made as comfortable as circumstances would permit."

"With the exception of a dastardly insult received from him who appears to be in chief command here," replied Mortimer, flushing with anger at the recollections of the event, "we have received every kindness and courtesy."

The visitor waved his hand deprecatingly.

"The matter has been reported to me," he said, "and you may rely upon it that I have severely reprimanded the offender. Only the existence of an extraordinary exigency has prevented the summary removal of the officer. Such action, I beg to assure you, is entirely contrary to the spirit and rules of our organization."

"Then I accept your explanation," answered Mortimer. "I'll only hold the man himself responsible for his act. Let us put that matter aside and pass on to other subjects. I wish to know what is this organization assembled here that has dared to hold in detention my friend and myself, both in the service of His Majesty, the King."

The visitor threw back his head proudly and answered without a moment's hesitation.

"You may have experienced some reticence on that subject from those about you," he said, "for it is well that subordinates should be trained to caution and to secrecy, but I have no hesitation in satisfying your inquiry. You are prisoners by the right of Might — the paramount right in the affairs of this world — and the body to which you are prisoners is the Federated Nihilists of America."

"Ah, Nihilists!" exclaimed Mortimer.

"Yes," was the reply; "commonly but very inaccurately referred to by you of the Court as 'Reactionists.'"

"And you," said Mortimer; "you are the High President?"

"I am the High President."

There was a momentary pause and Mortimer again spoke.

"Then, may I ask of you," he said, "as the head of this organization, what are your plans concerning us? Is this detention to last indefinitely, or have you any terms to offer us?"

"Let us be seated," answered the High President. "I have much to say to you and much may depend upon our conference. I see that you have smoking materials on the table. Pray smoke, if it please you, and if you think it will add calmness and wisdom to our deliberations."

Professor Dean had thus far not uttered a single word. There was a strange straining and puzzling going on in his mind. Certain accents in the voice of the High President struck upon his ear with a strange familiarity. Where before had he heard that voice? Was it among some of those whom he had recently met, or was it merely a resemblance conveying a suggestion of his former life — of the long ago?

They took their seats about the table and faced each other for a moment. Then the High President spoke.

"As I have told you," he said, "this body is known as the Federated Nihilists of America — a body which you, Captain Mortimer, have doubtless now and again vaguely heard referred to as 'The Reactionists.' Nothing could be more inaccurate, or misleading, than this term, inasmuch as the entire spirit of our organization is directly opposed to reaction. The royalists call us 'Reactionists' because they believe our aim is to upset the monarchical establish-

ment and revert to the former Republic. Nothing could be more wrong, and I say to you frankly that between the Monarchy of to-day and the old-time Republic, as it existed prior to the crowning of the first American King, the Monarchy is the better institution."

"If you admit that," said Mortimer argumentatively, "what is it you seek to attain?"

"That which the title of our organization implies," replied the High President. "We style ourselves Nihilists and, as you know, the word Nihil is from the Latin and signifies 'Nothing.' First, existing institutions must be wiped out — reduced to nothing — before we can build up the new. Our aim is to extinguish — to annihilate — to destroy — not only the existing monarchy, not only all relics and customs which have been handed down to us from the Republic preceding that monarchy, but all existing institutions. We regard these existing institutions as so unsatisfactory, so corrupt, so vile that it would be a useless task to seek to better them. You will never reach a given point, no matter how you may press onward or take turns to the right or to the left, if you are on entirely the wrong road. So it is with existing institutions. The conditions are so utterly and hopelessly wrong that it is a useless task to seek to improve them. The only recourse is to wipe everything out and build up entirely anew."

"Wasn't that idea formulated in Russia a long time ago?" asked Mortimer thoughtfully.

"The idea was agitated in Russia over a century ago," replied the High President, "and its advocates prosecuted in a more or less crude and barbarous fashion their ideas and their plans. It does not follow that because an idea is old, it is devoid of merit. On the contrary, nearly all the great ideas and move-

ments in this world have been in existence a long time — have been old — before the world has finally accepted them. The soil of Russia, however, never was a suitable soil for the cultivation of the plant of Liberty. Here in the broad, free American air, Liberty will flourish and give to mankind a new and happier era. Our Nihilism, while founded upon the same basic principle, is in its practical workings upon a far more scientific foundation. It is a Nihilism brought down to the requirements and the civilization of the twentieth century."

"And you really think this Nihilism of yours, with its Russian origin and its later-day modifications and improvements as worked out by you, better for the American people than the Monarchy?" asked Mortimer.

"Undoubtedly," answered the High President. "The American atmosphere and the genius of the American people are not really suited to a monarchy, although thanks to the trend of peculiar circumstances those forces here which favor that form of government — and I will admit they are by no means few or lacking in influence and power — have for the time being the upper hand. The real mission, however, of Americans, with all their faults and foibles, is to teach the world at large new and greater forms of liberty and human happiness, ever growing grander and greater throughout the successive cycles of time."

"And you think your Nihilism better suited for the American people than a republic, such as that which was supplanted by the present Monarchy?" said Professor Dean, who had been an attentive listener and who now for the first time joined in the conversation. "Ah, sir, I have heard you refer with striking disparagement to that Republic. I would gladly have you give some reasons for these views!"

"Bah!" exclaimed the High President contemptuously, "the old-time Republic, eh! Could anything more evil, corrupt, hypocritical, farcical and criminal exist under the sun than that old-time Republic of yours? All modern thinkers, writers and sociologists are agreed as to that. You have heard me say that of the two the present monarchy was the better institution, and I spoke advisedly."

"What — what!" stammered the Professor, fairly taken aback at the directness and violence of the attack. "Your reasons, sir — your reasons!"

"Reasons?" repeated the High President. "They will not be hard to give. To-day we have only one King. He is great and rich and powerful, so much so that he need seek no further self-advantages but may rest content with all that which is his. He need have an eye only to the welfare of his nation and his people. We have an aristocracy, too; also great and rich, so much so that they can well afford to lay self-interest aside and seek public life with a view solely to the greater glory of their country. There are exceptions to this, of course, but I speak of our aristocracy as a class. Then, too, our aristocrats of to-day have been aristocrats for a sufficient time to be at least free from the shortcomings, the arrogance and the vices which have ever marked the *parvenu*. Now let us look at the old-time Republic!"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the Professor, bending forward in his eagerness.

"The old-time Republic," continued the High President, "had not one king but many. You had not a monarch — serene and majestic, clothed in the royal purple, bearing the sceptre and crown and surrounded by the glitter and the glory of an imperial court. Instead, the land was divided up among a parcel of little rulers — men mostly of low origin

and ignoble ideals — who really exercised kingly power. Take your proud Empire State of New York — a state as broad, as rich and as populous as some of the great empires of Europe. Two little kings reigned there — the one, a small, shrivelled, old man who divided his time between the handling of parcels and the pulling of political wires; the other a beetle-browed, sullen ruler, whose brutal hands, reeking with crime and corruption, were ever stretched forth to grasp further plunder."

"By heaven!" exclaimed Mortimer, "was it really as bad as that!"

"I am quoting to you almost literally from the chronicles of the times," replied the High President. "These two little kings absolutely ruled the state between them. It was at their royal behest that governors were nominated and elected, legislators selected and judges put upon the bench. When any opposition to their respective rules appeared to threaten them, they promptly joined forces, fought shoulder to shoulder and, under prearranged agreement, divided the subsequent plunder. Behind them was an armed banditti of many thousand men, known as a police force and supposed to be organized for the protection and enforcement of law and order. As a matter of fact, this force was nothing less than an organized body of ravishers and despoilers, preying upon the people and levying tribute right and left. It is safe to say that the operations of all the banditti since the beginning of the Christian era, nor any invading army, ever equaled in the amount of loot secured the operations of the force I speak of which stood behind these two kings."

"Well, well," exclaimed Mortimer; "things must have been pretty bad in your Republic, Professor!"

Dean lowered his eyes as one who is ashamed.

"There is much that is correct in all this," he said; "much that I cannot truthfuly contradict. But proceed."

"Aye, and proceed I will," replied the High President stoutly. "The aristocracy which surrounded these kings — that is, the men who formed their courts and helped to administer the public affairs — were in many instances vulgar publicans; men who derived their incomes by the maintenance of groggeries and low dancing houses, or worse — gamblers, touts, and a sprinkling of ex-convicts and little lawyers. Such was the aristocracy and the environment of these kings — the men who really ruled the land. I have spoken so far of the proud Empire State of New York. If you turn to the East or to the South, the middle country or the West, you will find that much the same conditions prevailed. Deny it, if you can!"

"I think," protested the Professor, "that your criticism is, perhaps, directed into too narrow channels and that it treats too much of certain phases of mere partisan, or local politics."

"But was not each State sovereign and independent," retorted the High President, "and did not each State make its own laws and govern itself generally? Then, too, how was the Federal government itself made up except from the combined selections of the different States?"

"Still," persisted the Professor, "I think that your criticism might be directed toward more broad and general conditions of our national life."

"That, too, I will do since you have demanded it," replied the High President. "Let us go back to the days of almost primeval man. What did the chief of the tribe, or band, do? He parcelled out the best of the plunder, or possessions, among his strongest

fighting men, or else among the priests, or medicine men, or whoever was equally powerful with the fighting men in his particular way. Take it again in feudal England. What did the feudal Kings do there after the Norman Conquest? They divided the best lands of the country among the powerful Barons who formed their Court. And so it was in your Republic. The good things of the land — the great public franchises — were all parcelled out to these modern feudal Barons who waxed fat and built their wealth into the millions upon that which had been given them at the expense of the people."

"But there were, I remember, various objections raised," said the Professor, "to any other course being adopted — such as government ownership."

"Objections!" exclaimed the High President contemptuously; "objections can be raised to anything. The murderer doubtless has his objections to the gallows and the thief strongly objects to the jail. There was at least one shining example of government ownership in those days. Was there anything so reliable or so admirably administered as the public mails — entirely conducted by the government? How is it possible in a true Republic to contemplate that which belongs to the public being given away for the benefit and enrichment of the few and the public correspondingly robbed to that extent."

"And yet," remarked the Professor, "in spite of these criticisms which you make, it seemed to be generally admitted that our people under the Republic had better reason to be contented than the people of any other nation on the face of the globe."

"And so they had the right to expect to be," retorted the High President, "but surely what you advance is no argument. Ought the people here to be satisfied merely because they are comparatively

better off than the people of Scandinavia and the people of Scandinavia in turn be well content because they are comparatively better off than the people of the interior of China? But let us look further into the question as to how well the people under the Republic were contented. Were they really contented, or did they individually accept existing conditions because they could discover no particular way of changing them? Do you think that the average man among the great masses of the people was satisfied to work all his life for a pittance which was insufficient in most instances to fully furnish him, year in and year out, with the actual necessaries of life and see another man, of the same clay as himself, who could afford to squander aimlessly in one day upon an old bit of cracked porcelain, a piece of painted canvas, or some drab of the footlights, whose complexion was as false as her soul, as much money as that other man earned in a lifetime. And yet the one man was, perhaps, fully as well endowed physically and mentally as the other and the life work of the one was fully as useful to the community as the work of the other. Why, then, this awful disparity? Do you know, too, that statistics show that of ten adults dying under your vaunted Republic, nine went out of this world subjects for Potter's Field? I do not mean by this that they were actually so interred, for the love and respect of friends who lent their aid usually saved them from this, but I do mean that nine out of ten died without leaving sufficient behind them, after a lifetime of honest, unremitting toil, to actually pay their burial expenses."

"I was unaware of that," said the Professor, "and it certainly is a shocking disclosure."

"Shocking, indeed!" retorted the High President. "I do not think there is any disputing that. And

do you believe that the people were satisfied on the land question? It does not require any great depth of learning in political economy to know that the source of all wealth is the land. All that which we have is either taken from the earth, or else is grown upon or fed from the surface of the earth. Is it to be believed that God put the minerals, the oil, the coal into the earth for the benefit of an exclusive few, or that he put them there for the joint and common benefit of the masses of mankind? Did He make the surface of the earth fruitful and send the showers and the sunshine, which alone enable it to fructify, for the benefit of a chosen few, or for the common benefit of all? That the former was the case seems to have been the theory which prevailed under the Republic, for we find that the great bulk of the land was owned by the comparative few. Do you think the masses of the great cities were individually satisfied that acre upon acre of city blocks should be owned by certain families to whom all those dwelling in those blocks paid a heavy rent tribute year in, year out — a tribute amounting upon an average from one-fourth to one-third of the total income earned? What substantial difference was there between this and mediæval feudalism? And what did those land-cornerers do with the vast surplus sums accumulated from the tribute wrung from those rent slaves? The chronicles show that they cast about them for communities as yet in their incipiency but presenting possibilities of growing into populous centres of activity. In these growing communities, these land-gluttons bought up the best portions of realty, which they let lie for the time being, unused and unimproved, paying merely the low tax imposed upon unimproved property. The community was built up by the enterprise, the labor and the efforts of the massses; it grew

into a city and became populous; its land became valuable. When their vacant lots had acquired value through the efforts of the people — efforts in which they had in no way participated — these land-cornerers put up structures and proceeded with the old game of levying the rent tribute. If ever there was an instance of unjust enrichment, it was this."

The Professor remained thoughtfully silent.

"Talk not to me of the old-time Republic," continued the High President; "it died because of its innate rottenness — because of the apathy of its people — and the littleness and corruption of its public men. Look at the infamous record of your Food Trusts, which forced up the prices of many articles of food so that they were beyond the reach of the great mass of the poorer people. Contemplate the Coal Trust, whose directing powers first advanced, under the Republic, the hitherto exclusively monarchical claim of Divine Right, and proceeded to manipulate the coal supply so that citizens of the Republic were frozen to death, while thousands of unknown and unrecorded others undoubtedly perished from diseases incurred as a result of insufficient warmth. The unfortunate poor might have derived a little benefit by burning oil, but what did the eminent citizen of that day do who, while not claiming to be God's anointed, yet had contrived to absorb all the oil of the country? Why, he promptly took advantage of the situation and raised the price of oil. It is true that at the same time he, with reckless generosity, contributed some ten thousand dollars to a benevolent enterprise, but in the meantime he had pocketed a cool million by the advancement of the price of his commodity. Here was a million wrung out of the sufferings of God's poor and a sop of ten thousand dollars thrown out to hoodwink and propi-

tiate the Almighty. What must have been the Deity's sentiments over this estimate of the financial perspicacity which sought to deceive him by such a ruse — a ruse which would have been apparent to the intelligence of the dullest office-boy employed in a commercial institution!"

"All those events were duly criticised at the time," murmured the Professor, "and came in for their share of censure."

"Criticism — censure!" exclaimed the High President with disgust. "But what did the people do? Did they seize upon those who withheld the food and the warmth and rush them to public execution, as did the people of France with their oppressing nobles in the days of the great French Revolution? No; they did nothing! They waited and stared and suffered like dumb cattle driven to the shambles. And the public men of the day? They conferred a good deal and they even threatened a little, but — it was a very respectful threatening in the face of Mighty Capital. The Chief Magistrate of the Nation in that day was a man still young — a man strong, vigorous and bold, who had filled various public offices ably and well and had proved himself a brave soldier in the field. He was the people's idol and the people's hope. There was food in plenty to be had from other lands, but it was shut out from the people's use by an exorbitant protective tariff. Remove this tariff and food would have flooded in upon the people in boundless store and the corner in Monopoly and Death have been crushed out of existence in a week. Congress held the vested right to do whatsoever might be necessary for the welfare or safety of the people and a ringing message, couched in his old-time, fearless form, from this Chief Magistrate would have set the people throughout the length

and breadth of the land ablaze with enthusiasm. It would have put him beyond the power of any clique or party, and would have exalted him to the highest pinnacle of popular idolatry as the man of the hour, the people's choice! His party would not have dared to say him nay, for individually and alone he would have stood stronger than his party. It was an opportunity such as rarely comes to a ruler. But the voice of the cautious counselors surrounding him in his exalted station whispered in his ear: 'You have been accused of being too bold, as lacking in conservatism. Do not frighten, or attack, the great money interests — those representing the sacred and vested Rights of Capital — lest in their fear they turn and destroy you!' And he hearkened to this counsel. It is true, I believe, that a measure was finally passed temporarily admitting foreign coal free of tariff charge, but this measure came too late. The President's brave heart bled for the people, but his old-time fearlessness forsook him and he failed them. And when he so failed them, the last hope of the Republic went out. The Republic was doomed. The shadows of Plutocracy and of Monarchy lowered over the land!"

"And the Monarchy which came was an improvement, you consider, upon the Republic which preceded?" asked the Professor.

"At least in this respect," answered the High President, "that under a monarchy we may reasonably look for class distinction, for great wealth on the one side and for great poverty on the other, but in a true Republic, one worthy of the name, such distinction is as unnatural as it is iniquitous."

"Ah, now you are about to criticise the Monarchy, I suspect!" exclaimed Mortimer. "But, pray tell

me, is your Nihilism going to cure all these evils you have portrayed?"

"You speak of Nihilism," answered the High President gravely, "as if it were the beginning and end of the entire programme. As a matter of fact, Nihilism is only the beginning. As I have told you, we must first wipe out existing institutions so that we may properly build up a new Commonwealth, or Republic, founded upon the abolition of industrial slavery, the brotherhood of man and the more equal apportionment of benefits to the race."

"But you spoke particularly of the evils of individual land ownership," persisted Mortimer. "Would you under your scheme do away with that?"

"I undoubtedly would," answered the High President. "It seems to me a proposition beyond argument that God created the land and all within it for the benefit of mankind in general and not for the benefit of a given few. The land should no more be owned individually than the air, or the seas. It should be the property of all and inure to the benefit of all — in a word, belong to the State. Those using land, either urban or agricultural, should lease from the State and pay the rent tribute to the State and the benefits of the land — created by God for all — would thus inure to the benefit of all."

"Would not this tend to accumulate," suggested the Professor, "too vast sums in the hands of the State — sums so vast that there would constantly be a stringency of money and a consequent business paralysis?"

"The answer to that," replied the High President, "is that the State could by magnificent public improvements and in a hundred other ways find means of rapidly disposing of any such surplus it might acquire. It could, if necessary, pay out dividends to

its citizens, as the big corporations do to their shareholders. This objection you have advanced and a thousand others, will ever be urged to any change looking to an improvement of things. The people thus opposing will be found describing their opposition as Conservatism. The true definition of a Conservatism is a man very well off, who finds things preeminently satisfactory for him as they are and is, therefore, opposed to any change. Priestcraft, when it held communities and nations under its subjection, the feudal barons, emperors, kings and modern plutocrats — these, all these, you will find to have been staunch advocates of Conservatism. Did you ever reflect," continued the High President, "upon the inequality and injustice of existing laws of property ownership? When a man composes an opera, or indites a book of poems, or writes a novel, or devises some new and useful invention, he plays the part of a creator. Out of his own brain alone that production has evolved. It did not exist before he gave it birth and the world is so much the richer. If ever a man can be said to have a proprietary right in anything, it is to that property which actually was evolved from and created by himself alone. Yet, in the case of an author, or composer, the Law protects him in that property right for only twenty-eight years, and in the case of the inventor for only seventeen years. After that, their respective productions pass into the public domain — become public property. But the man who for a mere trifle acquires a tract, or parcel, of land — which he certainly had no part in creating or putting there — and holds it while a city builds about him and the land is made valuable by the presence and the efforts of the community at large — that man owns that land in perpetuity; it is the property of him and his heirs forever. And the Law itself!

What a monstrous combination of illogical deduction and of systematic injustice! The Law! Five years required to adjudicate a case which would be sufficiently disposed of in as many hours under any modern system of businesslike administration — the Law which can only be invoked under conditions of expense absurdly disproportionate to the results. Just think of a system which is supposed to adjudicate and do substantial justice between man and man and yet which nine men out of ten in the community will tell you means ruin to resort to! The Law in its methods of procedure is a century, or more, behind the times and the learned and time-honored profession of the Law is, in reality, the profession of the modern highwayman. There is no form of modern evil which more seriously demands the application of the principles of Nihilism than the Law as it to-day exists!"

"And if your New Republic could be established," asked Mortimer, "you would be in favor of ruthlessly despoiling all the present land owners of their holdings and escheating these holdings to the State?"

"That need not necessarily be done," answered the High President. "It would be no very difficult matter to assess the land at a fair valuation and for the State to pay to the owners thereof a given annual percentage for say fifty years to come, subject to certain qualifications. This would result in eventually reimbursing to the owners far more than they had originally expended and would give them ample time to accommodate themselves to the new condition of things. Of course, manifold objections, both technical and financial, will be urged to the feasibility of this plan — especially by those with tendencies to Conservatism — but I apprehend there are no ob-

stacles to its successful execution which cannot be overcome and it would certainly be immeasurably superior to the present system. With public franchises and the Nation's land thus inuring to the benefit of the whole people, the possibility of building up fortunes of two hundred and three hundred millions, or even of eight or ten millions, would be done away with. Surely this would be no misfortune!"

"But," said the Professor, "I have heard the objection raised to plans of this nature that their adoption would tend to lessen competitive activity and deaden men's energy and ambition generally."

"The objection is ill-founded," replied the High President. "If the maximum which a man might hope to attain were fixed at one million, or less, men would strive just as zealously for the fixed amount as they would when the possibilities are unlimited. As it is now, money makes money. It is not so much the billionaire himself who earns as the sheer weight of money behind him which accomplishes. He is not called upon to exercise any particular creative effort on his part and, worst of all, he handicaps the efforts of others more worthy. In any event, the guiding spirit of our New Republic will be the happiness and welfare of the many, as against the particular interests and privileges of the few."

"You have compared the old-time Republic adversely with the existing Monarchy," said the Professor, with whom this seemed to be a sore point, "yet from the little I have learned it seems to me that the wrongs of the masses are as great under the monarchy as ever they were under the Republic."

"To what phase do you refer in particular?" asked the High President.

"To the matter of their general welfare," replied the Professor. "For instance, I understand that the

coal supply is to be cornered this winter and immeasurable want and suffering inflicted broadcast."

"Ah!" exclaimed the High President quickly, "thank God that necessity will be obviated!"

"Indeed! How so?"

"There have been new developments recently," replied the High President. "Matters have perfected themselves more rapidly than was anticipated. There will be no necessity to wait until next winter. The hour has come! The New Republic is at hand!"

"The New Republic is at hand!" repeated Mortimer, smiling. "Why, you speak of this New Republic of yours almost as if it were an accomplished fact!"

"So nearly an accomplished fact," replied the High President, "that within ten days it will be here!"

The words were uttered gravely and impressively. They carried a strange conviction.

For a moment Mortimer sat silent, staring at the speaker. Then he leaned forward in his chair.

"And the King — the existing form of government!" he exclaimed.

"A thing of the past — overthrown!"

"This is preposterous!" cried Mortimer, a wave of anger flushing his brow. "I see you surrounded by certain evidences of preparation and power, otherwise your words would seem to me but idle vaporings. I believe that you are engaged in an armed conspiracy against the government, but that it will be successful I do not for an instant believe. And," he added with biting sarcasm, as his anger rose, "it is indeed typical of the strength and character of your organization when its admitted head does not dare to discourse sedition and treason in the presence of an officer of

the King save in closest concealment and with masked face!"

The High President started slightly; then proudly raised his head:

"My life is of value, not so much to me, as to the cause I serve," he said. "In all movements of this character certain precautions are essential. But the hour of precaution is well-nigh past and is certainly no longer needed with you whom we safely hold in our keeping. I came to you thus disguised, because I desired to speak to you simply as the head of this organization. I deemed it best, until I had secured your decision on a matter I shall present to you soon. But since this mask is made the means of a taunt to our organization, I will remove it and meet you man to man."

As the High President ceased speaking, he raised his hands to the mask and rapidly loosened the strings.

Sudenly the obscuring mists rolled aside from the Professor's brain, and before the mask had fairly been removed from the High President's features, he sprang to his feet with the cry:

"General Mainwarren!"

CHAPTER IV.

UNFOLDING THE PLAN.

Silence from all three succeeded for a few moments the Professor's startled exclamation. Then the High President spoke.

"Now," he said, turning to Mortimer, "now that I have removed the source of your reproach, I trust you will give weight and credence to my words."

"General," answered Mortimer, "your great military record, and your eminence as one of the financial powers of the land, are known to me as they are to the rest of the world. Your words must, therefore, have due weight with me, but I must admit, speaking frankly, not credence. Were almost any other to speak so, I should regard him as either a loose-brained visionary, or else one seeking to deceive. With you, I realize that neither is the case, but I cannot help considering that you are seriously mistaken."

"It is precisely to show you I am right that I am here," replied the High President.

"I'm much flattered," said Mortimer, "although I fail to see why you should be at any pains on that point."

"Never mind that for the moment," answered the High President. "You will learn the reason before our interview closes."

Mortimer bowed.

"I will begin by explaining to you," said the High President, "that this movement had its origin many years ago — in fact, it began almost immediately

after the Monarchy was first inaugurated. It began not with a united, organized body as we are to-day, but in a number of scattered, disunited elements possessed of widely divergent aims and objects. There were those who were opposed to the monarchical institution and who desired the return of the former Republic; there were others — and these were by far the larger and more important body — who were profoundly dissatisfied with the existing economic conditions and who eagerly, if vaguely, aspired to a change of some kind. There was but one common chord uniting these various elements; all were dissatisfied and all were more or less revolutionary. For a period I studied the problem of how to fuse these various scattered elements and the problem seemed so difficult that I was for a time in despair. It was just at that period that by a strange turn of Fate — or by the interposition of Divine Providence, as some may piously believe — that I found myself in a position of commanding financial power. From that day on the road grew easier for me. From that day on, I vowed to dedicate my life to raising my countrymen to a higher plane of liberty and happiness than the world had yet known. Washington had led them to freedom from the bondage of political tyranny; I would seek to free them from the far more bitter tyranny of economic bondage. To that cause, I have through the years devoted my fortune, my energies and my work. To that cause I am prepared, if need be, to lay down my life."

"A noble ideal, indeed!" exclaimed the Professor enthusiastically. "I admire and respect you for it."

"I appreciate the spirit which has animated you, General," said Mortimer, "although I dissent from some of the methods you may have adopted in its execution."

"My first care," said the High President, disregarding the interruption, "was to look about me for some means of unifying the various scattered elements of political and economic discontent. This I soon perceived could not be quickly done. It was a question of time, and above all, of education. By education, I mean teaching the individual members of the different elements precisely what were the causes of their unhappiness and discontent, wherein the true remedies lay and just what were the conditions they must seek to attain. To this end I carefully trained a corps of instructors, men and women. These people preached no sedition; they advocated no revolutionary movement. They simply taught a new form of interesting political economy, showing people why they suffered and where lay the remedy. I had not so much interest or concern for the great mass of those forming the existing army of discontent. They were mostly too set in their own old ideas and aims, although even among these were found some good material. My chief attention was given to the rising generation. Youth is easily taught and the impressions of youth are usually vivid and lasting. It was to the youth of the land we turned and the results exceeded the highest expectations. Before long there were great bodies of men throughout the country — men eager and bold with the intensity of youth — who were filled not with the vague, shadowy ideas of the political partisan, but with a clear knowledge of economics. And it was to the women of the country — to the mothers, the wives and the sisters — that we owed this most largely — a plan which I once had the pleasure of suggesting to you as applicable to your day, Professor Dean."

"Ah, yes," exclaimed the Professor, "but little

did I think you had actually put it into practical execution."

"Well, I had," answered the High President dryly. "While this work of education was going on I was doing everything in my power to render the general conditions hard as possible for the masses. It was a curious dual rôle I filled. With my entire being pledged to their ultimate upraising and welfare, I was temporarily inflicting upon them terrible hardship and suffering. By many I was regarded as a monster in human form; even the Court and the Chancellerie protested against what seemed to be my insatiable exactions — protested not because of the widespread misery and suffering inflicted, but because of the dangerous spirit of public discontent engendered. Ah, little they suspected that it was precisely this dangerous spirit of discontent which I sought to foster and to feed, for it is through the suffering and the misery of the people that the spirit is awakened which leads to great changes. In the light of this explanation, Professor, you will now understand the true meaning of the proposed corner in coal which so aroused your horror and indignation."

"Ah, I see it all now!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Thank heaven, there will now be no necessity for that measure and the awful misery and suffering it would have entailed," continued the High President. "But I will pass from that painful subject. In addition to the education of the people and to tuning the public spirit to the proper pitch of discontent and revolt by purposely imposed hardship and misery, I was busy with one other important subject. Governments and existing conditions may eventually be overthrown by education and the sentiment of the masses, but they cannot be thus directly overthrown. Governments and existing conditions are backed, sup-

ported and held in power by force, which is really the first and last word in the affairs of this world. Education as to cause, effect and remedy and the fostering of the necessary sentiment and spirit among the masses were well enough by way of general introductory processes, but if the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a new order of things was to be looked for, some means must be found of successfully overcoming the resistance of the armed forces of the King and of the Government. Do you follow me?"

"Very clearly," replied Dean, while Mortimer nodded a silent assent.

"As a soldier trained by practical experience in the art of war," continued the High President, "I realized how utterly futile it must be to attempt to arm, drill and organize a sufficient force of men to hope to successfully cope in open warfare with the trained soldiers of the King. To achieve successfully any such result, I must discover a new means of warfare which would give my attacking force some immeasurable advantage over our opponents. Not an easy problem to work out, eh, Captain Mortimer?"

"Decidedly not," replied Mortimer with evident interest.

"As you are perhaps aware," resumed the High President, "among the different great business interests to which I came into possession were several which involved various manufacturing processes. Among the many employes in my shops was a wild, aparently half-crazy sort of fellow who was, however, exceedingly clever as an inventor and who had already devised several really very ingenious and meritorious inventions. The man's first name was Nicholas; we will suppress for the present his last name. He was American born, but originally of

Polish origin and his forefathers had all, I understand, been inventors. This erratic fellow came to me one day. He had come across some old-time pamphlets or treatises in the library upon the subject of aërial navigation. There was one treatise by a certain Professor Dean which seemed to attract his interest strongly. He was full of the project and wanted to pursue an extended line of investigation of aërial navigation. I confess I listened with scant interest. The field seemed to me an unprofitable one commercially, for I could not see what practical benefit from a transportation standpoint would be gained by aërial navigation. It was doubtless for this very reason, I argued to myself, that the subject had thus far not been more fully taken up and advanced. Nicholas, however, was evidently not easily to be discouraged and I regarded his enthusiasm as a species of misfortune. Here was one of my valuable men off on a tangent and the result could only be that I would be a loser of his best efforts. However, I did not abruptly refuse Nicholas, but out of consideration for his feelings promised to give the matter some further thought."

"Ah," exclaimed the Professor, "how history repeats itself! It was always my experience whenever I approached men of position and power on that very subject to meet with discouragement and doubt."

"Listen to the sequel," said the High President. "That night I walked in my grounds. It was a rarely beautiful night, with a high, clear sky and a bright, full moon. My mind was occupied with its still unsolved problem. I looked up to the heavens above me, as if to seek there inspiration and light. Suddenly the thought flashed into my mind: What if an attack could be delivered from the skies above — from the very heavens themselves! Such an attacking force would be absolutely safe from attack

itself, while by dropping high explosives upon any enemy below it could inflict untold devastation. Then Nicholas came into my mind."

"But such form of attack is expressly forbidden by the rules of international warfare!" exclaimed Mortimer.

"I am aware of that," answered the High President, "but the rules of international warfare do not apply to revolutions by a people against their government."

"I suppose not," admitted Mortimer grudgingly.

"The next morning I sent for Nicholas," said the High President. "He found a much changed man. It will be needless for me to recount to you the ten thousand and one details in connection with the perfecting of our plans; our secret work of invention, our secret processes of manufacture, our secret places of trial and concealment of finished machines. Take, for instance, where we now are. We have here quite an extensive strip of territory, in a wild, little frequented region. It is held as private property. In the heart of this territory is this valley shut in on all sides by mountain heights — and it affords us ample opportunity of carrying on such work as may be necessary, quite safe from observation. On every side our men are out in the guise of keepers, carefully guarding every avenue of approach against possible chance of intrusion. Similar strips of territory and similar retreats we hold in various other parts of the country, for our plans are far too carefully laid for us to trust all our eggs to one basket. Let it be enough for me to say that everything has thus far progressed most satisfactorily and that we have to-day concealed in various places, all finished and ready for use, a sufficient number of air-ships, large and small, to carry out our plans. All this has been done with

such well-managed quietude and secrecy that not the slightest inkling has the government of the true state of affairs. You will now understand, Professor Dean, what I meant the day I remarked to you that your investigations in the line of aërial navigation were more important to the world than you dreamed of. You will also understand why it was that I was so desirous of inducing you to leave the Court and come to me to pursue your further work in that direction. It was not that I really needed you to develop air-ships, for that had already been accomplished; but I feared you might produce them for the benefit of the government. Such possible production was to us the most serious menace to our course, as you will doubtless realize."

"Yes; now that I understand all the circumstances," answered the Professor, "I see that very clearly."

"As it was," said the High President, "you certainly sprang your air-ship upon us with remarkable rapidity. I congratulate you upon your work and ourselves upon the fact that we have succeeded in capturing you and your ship before you had gone further. You can imagine the surprise to our fellows when they hailed and discovered that they were being pursued by a Royal air-ship. They are indeed to be commended for the discretion and skill with which they acted."

"In what respect?" asked the Professor.

"They had a machine on board," answered the High President, "which would have blown you to atoms, had they so desired, or they could have clapped on speed and have escaped you. Had they been fools, they would have done one or the other. Being sensible men, they did neither. They simply regulated their speed so as to lure you on and thus lead

to your capture. You see, it was desirable to ascertain as much about you as possible and learn how grave a peril to us your presence signified."

"That accounts for the peculiar movements I noticed during our pursuit," remarked the Professor.

"Doubtless," replied the High President. "Well, I am truly thankful they kept their wits and acted as they did. I am glad they did not allow you to escape and I am even more glad they did not resort to the other course. I abhor any unnecessary shedding of blood and I am grateful to Providence that our operations that night cost, at most, only one life. I may say to you that the life of the King has been repeatedly in our hands during our various visitations, but not one hair of his head has been injured."

"What was the object of these visitations?" asked the Professor curiously.

"To satisfy fully the scruples of some of the more conscientious among the leaders," answered the High President. "The present King had shown himself to be a more just and mild-mannered ruler than his predecessor and they thought he should be accorded the saving chances of reform and abdication. I was opposed to the plan as affording little prospect of practical results, but yielded so as to satisfy the consciences of these men — so that when the time came to strike they could feel that we had done so only after no other course was left."

"I see — I understand," said the Professor thoughtfully.

"And now," said the High President, "all is prepared. The air-ships are ready and their crews drilled to their work. We have in addition a sufficiently large number of men trained to act as an

auxiliary land force to follow up at the right moment the devastating work of the air-ships. The officers pin a gold star, the men a white star — the Star of Hope — to their left shoulders and in an instant you have a force sufficiently recognizable for our purposes. Should any body of men be compelled to retreat, they scatter, off with the star from the shoulder, and in an instant are re-converted into ordinary citizens. Conceive a body of men in a number of mobiles, so built as to be protected from ordinary rifle fire, and, hovering in the distance, awaiting the moment, a scattered mass of men on foot. These latter carry only concealed arms, and are apparently noncombatants. Imagine the men in the mobiles opening an attack upon a royal regiment, or other hostile body. The royal troops advance to the attack and the men in the mobiles begin to retreat. Then, from the heavens above, the air-ships, themselves unassailable, open their attack and hurl down high explosives upon the advancing troops. What becomes of the regiment? In a few moments it is decimated — annihilated! All that remains is for the men in the motors and the scattered footmen in the distance to sweep down upon the scene and take charge of the dead, the dying and the prisoners. The same way in attacking a fort, or royal palace. Our air-ships would hover high above and, themselves beyond the reach of rifles, or of canon, pursue their attack until the work of demolition was complete. As a military man, Captain Mortimer, I ask you how can such an attack be successfully resisted?"

"Are your air-ships rifle proof?" asked Mortimer.

"Perfectly so from all sides," answered the High

President; "but even if they were not, it would be an easy matter for them to keep beyond range."

"Quite so; and they could, of course, still be able to direct the explosives hurled with sufficient accuracy?"

"Absolutely," replied the High President. "I ask you again how can such a form of attack be resisted?"

Mortimer hesitated a moment before replying.

"It is obvious," he said at length, "that if one thousand riflemen are attacked in the manner you describe by one hundred of an enemy whom they cannot by any possibility reach or inflict any punishment whatsoever upon, the one thousand men must necessarily succumb to the one hundred. In the case of artillery, the artillerymen would be no better off, for if their enemy were lodged directly above, heavy guns could not be raised to a sufficient pitch to bring the enemy within range. These propositions are so simple that, I take it, there is no disputing them."

"And as to a fort?" asked the High President.

"Substantially the same principles must apply," answered Mortimer.

"The government's warships," continued the High President, "are scattered over the various seas. But let us assume that a number of them were concentrated in Atlantic waters. Could a ship of the sea do successful battle with a ship of the air, hovering directly above her and raining death and destruction down upon her decks? I ask you, what chance would a ship of the sea have?"

"A warship," answered Mortimer with impatience, "could, of course, not elevate her guns so as to bring within range anything immediately above her."

"Then," exclaimed the High President tri-

umphantly, "I am pleased to find that our minds are in accord on at least some important points and we can now, perhaps, come to an understanding."

"I don't fully catch your meaning," said Mortimer.

"You don't suppose," answered the High President, "that I have held this interview with you and disclosed our position so thoroughly simply for the purpose of discussing political economy, or questions of military tactics?"

"Perhaps not," said Mortimer. "I await the explanation of your purpose."

"It is this," replied the High President. "I sought first to show you the merit and justice of our cause, and next, our certitude of success. You, Captain Mortimer, with your military experience, and you, Professor Dean, with your scientific attainments, would be valuable additions to our ranks — not so much for the first attack, for all the details of that first attack are already mapped out and settled; but for the subsequent work of organization and handling great masses of men which must necessarily follow our preliminary successes. We shall first attack the palace and almost simultaneously the city of New York. We shall seize upon the persons of the King and the officers of the Government. This preliminary success and demonstration of our power will be accompanied by uprisings all over the East, followed a little later by similar movements in the West and the South. How could you lend your aid to a nobler work than the uplifting of your countrymen in particular and of mankind in general — how engage in a more truly patriotic task! I invite you — I beg you — to aid in this cause — to join our ranks."

The High President paused, with eager eyes turned

upon his auditors. For some moments they sat in silence.

"I await your answer," said the High President, turning his gaze directly upon Mortimer.

For yet a moment Mortimer sat speechless. At last he spoke.

"General Mainwarren," he said, "I don't doubt the high impulses and sentiments which direct your action, otherwise your words would convey to me the grossest insult. Understanding these impulses and sentiments as I do, I can accept your words in the spirit in which they are intended. But, sir, remember that I wear the uniform of an American army officer. That uniform, so far as is known, has never covered but one traitor and the world-wide obloquy and contempt which in his own period and through succeeding generations has followed the name of Benedict Arnold, should be a sufficient example and lesson for prospective traitors in all generations to come. The function of an army officer is not to delve in social economics, or meddle with political questions. He must leave these matters to others. His duty is to uphold the government of the country and to forever stand ready to defend and die for, if needs be, the interests and the honor of his country and his flag. Such are the views I hold, General Mainwarren, and — you have my answer."

The High President, in turn, paused before making reply.

"I, too," he said at length, "understand and appreciate the sentiments which dictate your answer. I do not consider that these sentiments are correct from the highest and broadest standpoint of patriotism and human effort, but the answer, such as it is, I must accept, much as I regret it. And you," he

added, turning to Professor Dean; "what is your decision?"

The Professor answered without a moment's hesitation.

"I am," he said, "more in touch and sympathy with your project and your aims than Captain Mortimer is, or could be expected to be. Had you depicted to me those projects and described to me those aims on the day we first met, my answer might have been different from that which it now must be. As it is, I have embarked in this joint enterprise with my friend, Captain Mortimer, and I should regard myself as playing the rôle of traitor which he so severely contemns were I now to fail him. I shall stand shoulder to shoulder with Captain Mortimer in this enterprise, at least, to the very end."

The High President rose and extended his hand.

"Re-meeting!" he exclaimed. "My mission here has failed. There is nothing more to be said."

He moved toward the door. Dean called after him.

"One moment," he cried; "there is a question I would ask. You spoke just now of blood having been spilled the night of the chase. What did you mean? Was there some mishap which happened to those we were pursuing? I saw no accident.

"No," answered the High President, pausing, "no accident occurred to any of those you were following. It was at the palace."

"At the palace! What do you mean?"

"According to the report made me," continued the High President, "it came about in this way. Our men in the air-ship were preparing to approach the window of the King's chamber, but prior to doing so were scouting around the immediate neighborhood to ascertain if the coast was clear."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Dean, "we noticed that!"

"Next to the King's chamber was a room with open windows," went on the High President, "occupied, as they knew, by an officer on guard. Either an air current must have affected the air-ship which was at the moment almost motionless, or the steersman made some slight miscalculation, for they suddenly drifted in too close to the room. Our men suddenly saw an officer in full uniform spring forward and peer out. It looked as if he had caught sight of them and was about to give an alarm. Instantly, one of our men fired. The officer was seen to stagger back and, without groan or cry, he fell!"

With a cry of rage and pain, as of some wounded animal, Mortimer clenched his hands and began pacing the floor, in deep agitation.

"But how can this be!" exclaimed Dean. "We were close at hand and we heard no sound — no shot!"

"You forget," replied the High President indulgently, "that most of our firearms to-day are noiseless as well as smokeless."

"My God — my God!" exclaimed Mortimer, still pacing the floor, "that officer was Ralph — my comrade and friend, Captain Swords. Tell me, did that shot kill?"

"That is not known," replied the High President. "After the shot, our men hovered around, peering into the lighted room and prepared to flee at the slightest sign of an alarm. But no sign of such alarm appeared. The officer's fall upon the heavy carpet appeared to have been unheard, for no one came to the room and he lay there motionless. Our men then passed on to their work at the King's window, when you appeared a moment later upon the scene. You know the rest."

"To think that he is lying wounded, perhaps dead, and I here — a prisoner!" muttered Mortimer fiercely.

"The fortunes of war," replied the High President coldly. "What is one life in such a struggle? Alas! think of the many, many lives which must be sacrificed before this contest closes. As to your imprisonment, I am willing to give you the freedom of this entire valley upon your parole not to leave it, or to attempt any communication whatsoever with the outside."

"I refuse such parole," answered Mortimer curtly.

"And you, Professor Dean?"

"I follow Captain Mortimer's lead absolutely."

"Very well," answered the High President, "prisoners you must then remain. But console yourselves with the thought that it will not be for long. Ten days from to-day the signal to attack will flash forth — in ten days from to-day the new era will have dawned and your freedom will be near at hand. Look forward to your liberation — as tens upon tens of millions are awaiting their liberation — to the birth of the New Republic!"

He sprang up the steps and called to the sentinel without. The door was hurriedly thrown open and an instant later he was gone.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE MESSAGE

The days passed. Captain Mortimer sat with bowed head and heavy brow, resisting Valerie's archest smiles and brightest sallies. The fine appetite he had displayed on the occasion of the first breakfast had deserted him and Valerie's choicest dishes went back practically untouched. Was there anything she could get for him? No; nothing. Was there anything special he would like prepared? No; absolutely nothing. To all her questions only the same brief, though polite, negatives. Valerie was in despair.

Alone with Dean, the one topic was escape. They had again carefully examined the cabin. There were two portholes on each side — too small to permit of the egress of even a boy's body — and the floors, walls and ceilings were certainly too strongly constructed to be open to successful attack by men whose only tools were two pocket knives and a sword. Evidently their only possible chance was by the door.

To the door, then, they turned their attention. It was too strong to give way to any sudden onslaught and any extended work upon it would certainly be heard by the sentinel outside. Besides, the Professor pointed out, even if they did succeed in breaking through and getting past the sentry, they would doubtless be quickly surrounded and overpowered by the other men of the camp.

"It's probably true," Mortimer replied. "But I

intend to make an attempt at all hazards. It's better to die in the valley outside, after a good hot fight, than to perish heart-broken, cooped up here."

Then began a search for methods by which they could get past the door and reach the sentinel outside.

"Why not lie in wait at the door," suggested the Professor, "and when the food is brought in we can make one spirited dash?"

"No, that won't do," Mortimer said. "It is Valerie who brings the food; we can't treat her so."

They discussed a plan whereby one of them was to feign illness and ask for a doctor, or other medical assistance; but it was repugnant to them both to seek advantage in any form over one who came on an ostensible errand of mercy.

They at last hit upon the much simpler expedient of sending a message demanding to see the man in command. Henry, with his brutal directness, would probably jump at the conclusion that they sought some concession, or had some terms to propose. With him they would have no scruples.

Accordingly, when Valerie brought in the dinner on the fourth day following the visit of the High President, the Professor broached the subject.

"My dear Miss Robert—" he began.

"Call me Valerie. Everybody does here. It's so much simpler," said the girl, as she busied herself with the table.

"Ah, yes; certainly. My dear Miss Valerie—"

"Simply Valerie; or you may say 'dear Valerie,' if you like," replied the girl, archly.

"Well — ah — Valerie, then!" stammered the Professor, "would you mind conveying a message for us, or, to speak more accurately, I should say causing a message to be conveyed for us, since we would

prefer — and you will no doubt know how to manage this — that such message should not come from either yourself or your father. Perhaps, I might suggest, you could so contrive as to enable us to send it by one of the sentinels outside this door?"

The girl glanced at the Professor curiously.

"What is the message?" she asked.

"That we demand to see the person in command here — Colonel Henry, I believe."

"Oh! won't father do?"

"No, no; not at all! We want to see the one in chief command."

"Any complaint as to the cooking or the service?" asked the girl pertly.

"Really, Miss ——"

"Valerie!"

"You embarrass me."

"I love to do that!"

"But you will grant what we ask?"

"I'll see about it and let you know to-morrow," she replied, as she started for the door.

The following morning at breakfast they again questioned her. She had not yet had an opportunity to attend to the matter. At mid-day the same answer, but a promise that they should have word at the next meal.

The next meal came and with it Valerie. The captives felt their hearts sink at her first words. Colonel Henry would not see them.

"What was it he said when our message was given him?" asked Mortimer, "and by whom was it given?"

Valerie hesitated in a manner very unusual to her before replying. Then she broke out impetuously:

"He did not say anything, because the message wasn't carried. It would have been useless. Papa

tells me that the High President gave imperative orders that Colonel Henry was not to deal in any way with you. You are held subject to the orders of the High President himself."

"Why didn't you send the message anyhow?" demanded Mortimer, a bit impatiently. "Colonel Henry might decide to see us — you can't tell. You don't realize how important it is that we see him."

She did not answer these reproaches for some moments. Then suddenly she turned upon Mortimer.

"Even if the High President hadn't given such orders, do you think I would bring you and 'Black Hawk' Henry face to face after what has happened? Colonel Henry is furious. You throttled him before his men and on top of that he was severely reprimanded by the High President for his treatment of prisoners."

"How about the insult to me — the cause of it all?" Mortimer asked.

"I don't know anything about that," she answered, "but I'm not so foolish as to bring burning oil and gunpowder together! Won't father do as well?" she asked in conclusion.

"No!" Mortimer hastened to answer.

"Will anybody else?"

"Oh, yes; anybody else will do, if he doesn't come direct from Captain Robert," Mortimer assured her.

"I don't see how it can be managed," she said.

For a moment they were both in despair. Then Mortimer spoke up.

"You've been very kind to us," he began, "and we're indebted to you for many favors. Believe me, we both of us appreciate and are grateful to you from the bottom of our hearts."

A deepening tinge of color crept into the girl's

face, as she looked up at him with smiling eyes, her white teeth showing between her full, red lips.

"We have one more favor to ask of you," he continued, "a rather peculiar favor and one which, I trust, you won't misunderstand. Should you decide to grant it, you must do so blindly, without asking a single question as to the why or wherefore."

"What is it?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Just this: that to-morrow one of our meals shall not be brought by you and that you will let us know in advance which of those meals it is to be."

The girl's head dropped and the color paled from her face. For a moment she said nothing. Then she looked up.

"The dinner is ready," she said. "Why don't you eat?"

"I can't eat to-night," answered Mortimer impatiently.

"It's horrible to see you pining away in this fashion," said the girl. "You'll die if this keeps up."

"Men don't die so easily," replied Mortimer, with a short laugh. "But you haven't answered what I asked you."

She hesitated for a moment.

"Do nothing — make no attempt of any kind to-day," she cried with sudden vehemence. "Wait until to-morrow! To-morrow I'll bring you good news!"

And with these words she turned quickly and fled up the steps.

At breakfast time next morning she lingered in the cabin longer than usual. To Mortimer's questioning glance, she returned for answer the single word: "Wait!"

At mid-day she appeared, bearing her tray as usual,

but when she began to unload it they noticed skilfully concealed among the dishes, two small coils of rope. Her cheeks were flushed and here was an unwonted agitation in her manner.

"You wouldn't eat my food," she said, "so I've brought you something which will be more welcome." And she touched one of the coils of rope lightly with her finger.

"Won't you speak more plainly?" exclaimed the Professor, with evident excitement.

"My meaning!" retorted the girl, with impatience. "What do you suppose I mean except — your escape. Do you think I am both blind and stupid! Do you think I haven't seen how you," and she glanced toward Mortimer, "have been eating your hearts out here? Do you imagine I didn't guess your meaning when you wanted the 'Black Hawk' to come to you, or when you wanted me to keep away? Valerie was bright enough to understand the meaning of that!"

"We certainly didn't mean to reflect upon your intelligence," replied the Professor. "We only hoped you would close your eyes sufficiently to aid us in our plans."

"There's a big move of some kind about to take place here," said Valerie, "and it wouldn't astonish me if father were ordered away at any moment. Now, I'm not going to take any chance of leaving you here at the mercy of the 'Black Hawk.' He'd kill you at the first chance — he's quite capable of it. So I'll help you in any way to get off."

"We thank you heartily," answered the Professor. "But what's your plan?"

"Listen!" said Valerie. "All the men in camp here have gone off to Minden Plains, which are back of Pedisgill Hill, to practise some special manœuver

— all except the man at the door here, and five men who are at work in Big Bear Gap, which is almost at the other end of the valley. They are at work on some air-ships there and the 'Black Hawk' is keeping an eye over them."

"Yes, yes," assented the Professor, "but how are we going to get out of here?"

"When I next return," said Valerie, "you will seize and bind me securely with one of these cords, which for all anybody will know you found by ransacking the cabin."

"But how shall we deal with the sentry outside?" questioned the Professor.

"Oh, that will be simple enough," replied Valerie. "Jack is on guard and Jack will do anything I say, even though it were to send a bullet through the 'Black Hawk' himself. After you have secured me, you will give three light taps upon the door. Jack won't be very much surprised when he opens the door if you suddenly pounce upon him and secure him in the same way that you do me. You are two to one and his capture need not create suspicion. He will struggle, of course, just to keep up appearances, but don't hurt the poor boy, since he is really our friend."

"I don't like the plan," broke in Mortimer, speaking for the first time, "since it involves violence — or rather the appearance of violence — to you. I would much rather you were not mixed up in this — much rather that it were managed by that fellow Henry coming here, or someone else."

"Don't be silly!" exclaimed Valerie. "It's the kindest thing you can do for me, since it will serve to divert suspicion far more than any other plan."

"Still, I don't like it," retorted Mortimer obstinately. "I would give almost anything I possess

to escape from here, but I don't like your being involved."

"I'm bound," said Valerie, determinedly, "that you shall not remain behind at the mercy of the 'Black Hawk.' You've got to escape. But," she added, her manner softening, "you'll promise me that after you are safely away, you will never bring anything here that will do injury to me or mine — to the men of this camp?"

"Should I ever succeed in escaping," answered Mortimer solemnly, "I'll promise never to disclose the situation of this valley, or to lead, or direct, any attacking force here. More than this I can't promise."

"It is enough," said Valerie. "And you?" she asked, turning to Dean.

"I hold myself bound by the same promise as that given by Captain Mortimer," he replied.

"Very well. Now listen carefully," she continued. "Your air-ship has been moved from where you last saw it. It's no longer in this inlet. When you pass the door, keep straight out into the main valley. The moment you reach the valley you will notice, a short distance away, two inlets to the right. Keep on to the second inlet and there, among several others, you will find your air-ship. If you are seen at all, it won't be until after you have risen well over the mountain tops, and long before any of the men can get back to the air-ships, you will be well out of sight and beyond any chance of pursuit. Besides, I don't believe they will attempt any chase as they have never taken any chance of the air-ships being seen by going above the mountain tops in daylight. How the 'Black Hawk' will carry on when he finds you have got away! I owe him a grudge or two and it will be great fun to see him storm

and rage. You have now the whole plan. Are you sure you understand it?"

"Quite!" replied the Professor.

"Keep it well in mind, then," said Valerie. "In half an hour I shall be back and the time for you will have come."

She ran up the steps and tapped three times lightly on the door. As it opened they caught a glimpse of the big, good-natured face of the sentry, as he beamed joyously upon the departing Valerie.

When the door closed after her, Mortimer began striding up and down the cabin, strongly agitated by conflicting emotions. On the one hand was his strong desire to escape from confinement, so maddening under existing circumstances; on the other hand was his dislike for the means to be adopted.

"Is it right?" he asked the Professor, "to let this girl mix herself up in this? We ought not to let her run risks in our behalf. How do we know what may be the consequences to her? If she's suspected, this devil, Henry, would stop at nothing."

"Oh! you're hypersensitive," responded the Professor. "Valerie can be trusted to find her way out of any entanglement. The best thing for us is to accept the chance she offers and get away."

Mortimer listened, but shook his head moodily and seemed by no means satisfied.

Thus the half-hour quickly sped by and, punctually at its expiration, the door opened and Valerie reappeared.

"All ready?" she exclaimed, in rapid tones.

Mortimer raised his head slowly.

"I shall not go," he said.

"Not go! and why?"

"For the reasons I've explained. Don't think,

though, that I am insensible to your great kindness — that I thank you the less."

"Keep your thanks till some other time," exclaimed Valerie, with flushed cheeks; "now is the time to act. You won't go, eh? We'll see about that. When I make up my mind to something, that something generally comes off, as you shall see!"

With these words she sprang up the steps and tapped on the door. It was immediately opened.

"Jack, come here!"

Jack, grinning broadly, promptly descended into the cabin. Valerie dropped into a seat and pointed to one of the little coils of rope.

"Tie me, Jack."

Jack's eyes opened wide in astonishment and he hesitated.

"Tie me, Jack. Since when did you begin to disobey my orders? Hurry, I say."

Thus admonished, Jack seized the rope and, with a few skilful turns, bound her fast.

"Now," she cried triumphantly, turning her head toward Mortimer, "now will you go, or will you remain here until someone comes and finds us and we all get into trouble for nothing?"

"Yes; hurry up and do something," cried Jack impatiently. "Either I must be choked dumb and tied up, or I must get back to my post. What are you making so much fuss about anyway? Don't you want to go back home to fight? You look like a pretty niftily set up sort of a man," he continued, addressing Mortimer, "but the other doesn't look as if he would count for much. Come, hurry up! You've wasted too much time already!"

"You're right!" exclaimed the Professor, and, rope in hand, he fell upon Jack and quickly secured him.

As for Mortimer, Jack's reference to going home to fight aroused him. Rapidly there flashed through his mind the vision of a strangely-fought and bloody struggle in progress, his regiment attacked and he absent from his men and from his duty.

He glanced at the Professor now rapidly completing the work of securing Jack. Then he crossed to where Valerie sat.

"You win," he said with emotion; "I accept your sacrifice and will go. But remember, should you find yourself in peril as the result of this, one word sent to me at the palace and I'm at all times ready to return and surrender myself."

"Include me in that proposition," interjected Dean.

"Pull tighter round the ankles!" called out Jack, and the Professor again bent to his task. A couple more turns of the rope, a few sharp tugs and he stood up, his work completed.

"Go!" whispered Valerie, with pleading lips and eyes upturned to Mortimer. "Go, before it is too late."

He lingered yet a moment.

"Don't forget my offer," he said, "should you find yourself in peril. I hold myself your debtor for life. You will remember?"

"Ah! But will you remember something?" returned Valerie hastily. "You are going into a greater danger than will surround me. In these awful days that are to come it is you that most likely will need help. Will you remember you have a friend among your — enemies? If I can help you, remember I— I — Oh! Go, go quickly!"

"Come, it's time we were off," exclaimed the Professor, touching Mortimer lightly upon the arm. The Captain started. Stooping, he kissed Valerie's

hand and tried to murmur his gratitude to the girl, before he turned to follow the Professor. Tears were in her eyes; her lips trembled slightly.

They reached the head of the steps and were outside the door. Mortimer turned and waved a farewell. Then Dean banged to the door and shot the bolts.

Rapidly they traversed the gully, reached the main valley and peered out. No one was in sight. To the right were the two gullies, just as Valerie had described. Skirting closely the base of the mountain to keep as much as possible out of sight, they reached the entrance to the first gully and peered in.

The saw several air-ships, but nothing else. On they kept and, a few moments later, had reached the second gully. Air-ships here, too, and, joyful sight, their own air-ship away back at the end there. The coast was evidently clear and they would reach it in a few minutes and be on board. How fresh and sweet the air smelled! How good it was to be free!

They pushed on over the intervening space and had proceeded some fifty yards when around the stern of one of the air-ships before them a man came into sight. One glance at the burly figure and black beard was sufficient. It was the "Black Hawk."

They recognized him and, with an astonished shout, he as quickly recognized them.

Instantly he advanced toward them.

They were in a species of small clearing, with air-ships on all four sides. Mortimer halted. All his moodiness had disappeared. There was a strange light in his eyes and a smile upon his lips. He cast a rapid glance around him. There were no others in sight. Ah, God was good! There was the blue sky above their heads and the green grass beneath

their feet and he and the "Black Hawk" were face to face.

An instant more and he confronted them. A sword hung at his side and upon his left shoulder there glittered the gold star of an officer of the Army of the New Republic.

"So," he said, his black beard bristling, his eyes snapping with hatred, "so you dogs have escaped from your kennel, eh?"

From Mortimer there came no reply. He stood gazing upon his enemy, the same peculiar light in his eyes and smile upon his lips.

"But you'll quickly march back again," he continued, with a malignant snarl. "At least one of you. As for you, Mr. Fine Feathers, I am glad to see you are armed, for no blame can then be put upon me. Later, too, I'll find out how all this happened. I suspect that heifer, Valerie, had a hand in this!"

The words sealed his fate. For Valerie's sake, the thought flashed through Mortimer's mind, this man must not escape him.

"Let me first pay my debt!" he exclaimed, and his long, sinuous arm shot out and struck Henry, with open palm, full in the face.

The blow was so sharp and so sudden that Henry reeled. In an instant, however, he had recovered himself and his hand flew to his sword. Mortimer drew with equal celerity.

They sprang together and their swords crossed.

Henry was an expert swordsman and was regarded among the men of the camp as an invincible champion with this weapon. He attacked with all the confidence of one who holds victory certain. He little dreamed, however, of the skill against which he was now matched — a skill which in bygone days had held wild Kurd horsemen and fiery Cossacks alike

successfully at bay and had given its owner the reputation of the crack swordsman of the American ranks. Mortimer fenced smartly, as one on parade, and the smile still hovered about his lips as he parried his opponent's fierce attacks.

It was soon over. There was a quick parry, a sharp feint and Mortimer's arm shot out in a lightning-like lunge. Back reeled Henry and dropped heavily to earth. Mortimer's sword had passed beneath his opponent's black beard and had penetrated deep into the throat. He lay gasping — dying; choked with the blood which ebbed from the great wound and gushed in a gory tide over his neck and breast.

Mortimer shook the blood from his sword.

"That's what the swordsmen of the French school call '*le coup de cochon*,'" he said. "It's a very neat stroke — when properly delivered." And he turned coolly toward Dean.

But the latter stood leaning for support against the side of one of the air-ships, looking with strained eyes and blanched face at the form upon the ground.

"Ah, I forgot," exclaimed Mortimer, "you're not accustomed to scenes of this kind. It's astonishing, though, how soon one does get used to them in war."

"Can we lend him no aid," asked Dean and, overcoming his feelings, he advanced and knelt beside the wounded man.

"He's beyond human assistance, I assure you," said Mortimer. "I have never known a recovery from that stroke."

And he was right, for as Dean bent down he saw a great shiver pass over the frame of the prostrate man and a moment later all was over; the "Black Hawk" lay dead.

"Come; there is no time to lose!" exclaimed

Mortimer, and seizing Dean under the arm he half led, half carried him to where their air-ship lay. A hasty scramble on board; an equally hasty inspection of the apparatus to ascertain that all was in order; a quick working of the levers by the Professor and they were away.

Steadily and gracefully they rose until they were above the mountain tops and the country lay well beneath them. Away in the distance they perceived a number of men, apparently engaged in the execution of certain manœuvers. These were evidently the men referred to by Valerie as drilling on Minden Plain. From a sudden commotion among the men it was evident the air-ship had been seen.

"We seem to be creating some excitement!" exclaimed Mortimer, referring to this circumstance. "I wonder if they will attempt a pursuit."

"It will be a very useless effort if they do," replied Dean.

"Well," remarked Mortimer, "you know their craft is a good deal faster than ours."

"Yes, I know," answered Dean, "but long before they can even reach their ships, we will have disappeared from view. We are at least fast enough for that and don't forget that we leave no trail behind us."

Up and up they rose until they were invisible to anything upon the surface of the earth. Onward they sped, and no pursuing form appearing behind them, they realized that they had indeed escaped. For an hour or more they held on thus and at last Dean spoke.

"I have been keeping entirely away from our proper course," he said, "as in that manner I thought we should be less likely to be in the line of pursuit, if indeed a pursuit be attempted at all. I feel that

we are quite safe from that now and I had best lay the course for the palace, I suppose?"

"I should think that would be the right thing to do," assented Mortimer.

"But first," said Dean, "in case of any possible further mishap, I think it would be well for us to open up communication with Kearns and send him a message. Don't you think it is time that he had one?"

"Decidedly," answered Mortimer. "An excellent idea. But can you do it? Remember the instrument is in his room in the Chancellerie and the windows of that room face South, while we are now due North."

"Quite so," answered Dean, "but the instrument in that room is connected with one on the roof of the Palace, so that at this altitude I can operate from all four points of the compass.'

Dean brought the air-ship to a standstill and allowed it to drift in the air currents. Then he applied himself to the aërestograph.

Silently Mortimer sat awaiting results. Presently Dean laid aside the instrument and turned to Mortimer.

"He does not make any response," he said. "He is probably away from the instrument. We must try again later."

Dean again started the air-ship and for half an hour they kept on their course. Then Dean again stopped and gave the aërestograph a further trial.

"Ah!" he exclaimed immediately, a pleased expression coming into his face; "now we have him!"

Dean operated the instrument for a minute or more and then was occupied for quite some time in the reception of the reply. Kearns, thought Mortimer, was evidently either not a very rapid or very accurate

operator, or else the reply must be of some length. At last it was over and Dean sent back a brief answer.

"Very curious!" he muttered, laying aside the instrument.

"What is very curious?" questioned Mortimer.

"The reply to our message."

"What was it?"

"First let me give you what I sent," said Dean. "It was this: 'We have been prisoners, but have escaped. We are returning with big news and fullest information.'"

"Yes, yes," replied Mortimer; "that would seem to cover the ground very nicely. And the answer?"

"This," replied the Professor, "is the somewhat curious answer I've received: 'Strange happenings since you left. Do not return direct to palace, but time arrival until after dark and manage unseen descent at some quiet spot. Will meet you in park at northern end Queen's Walk at midnight.'"

"That's certainly a rather strange message," said Mortimer.

"I should call it very strange!" replied Dean thoughtfully. And, with his hand upon the lever, he again started on through space.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW CHANCELLOR

These were days of great news happenings at the palace. An officer of the Guard, Captain Stanley Mortimer, had strangely disappeared and another officer of the Guard, Captain Ralph Swords, had been discovered, in the anteroom of the King's chamber, senseless and bleeding from a mysterious bullet wound in the head, inflicted upon him while on guard duty. Fortunately the bullet had struck at a sharp angle and had glanced from the parietal bone, inflicting a severe but not necessarily fatal wound. It had been a narrow escape for Captain Swords, who would be laid up for some time under the palace physician's care.

There were various vague rumors afloat concerning these events; rumors that hinted at an attempt upon the life of the King. Still, nothing definite was ascertainable.

Even more talked of was the death of Duke Marquanna, the great Lord Chancellor of the realm, the famous Warwick of the American monarchy. He had been found dead in his bed on the morning following the last Court ball, having passed away peacefully during the night.

The air was full of gossip about the late Duke and particularly as to his probable successor. It was well known that it had been the ambition of the late Duke that his son should succeed him. But the Marquis Marquanna, while shining as a social leader,

a sportsman and a setter of the fashions, seemed to have either little ambition, or little inclination, for the more weighty and burdensome affairs of State. It was true he had given a name to a new cocktail, or rather, an old cocktail somewhat altered as to its component parts had been named after him, as also a new style of cravat and a new brand of cigars, and the Marquis seemed to think that with this he had accomplished all that ought reasonably to be expected of him in this life.

It thus created no very general astonishment when the King named as his Chancellor, to succeed the late Duke, Lord Cyril Ashley, whose fulfillment of the duties of Vice-Chancellor had familiarized him with the work in hand. Lord Ashley had in consequence of this appointment severed his connection with the Army and had at once assumed the office of Chancellor.

Almost his first move as Chancellor caused irritation to those forming part of the Royal Household. Owing to Lord Ashley's own resignation from the Guards and to the absence of Captain Stanley Mortimer and the present disability of Captain Ralph Swords, there existed one permanent and two temporary vacancies in the Guards corps.

The ordinary staff appointment lay usually with the War Office, but in the case of appointments to the Guards the selection was made by His Majesty himself from a list of officers specially distinguished and submitted by the Minister of War.

It had leaked out — in that mysterious way that things will leak out at Court — that Lord Ashley, in his position of confidential adviser to the King, had interfered in this instance with the list submitted, as far as two of the appointments, at least, were concerned. The officer selected to fill the permanent

vacancy was Captain Farquharson, an officer of excellent family with a gallant service record. His name had been on the list submitted by the Minister of War and his appointment gave general satisfaction at Court. The other two appointments, to fill the temporary vacancies, were those of Captain Haslam and Captain Bagley. These two names were not in the list furnished by the Minister of War and neither officer had won any special distinction in the service. Both had served in the field, and that which was chiefly known concerning Captain Bagley was that he had at one time been tried by court martial for the summary execution of certain Cossacks under circumstances — if the charges advanced were true — of exceptional brutality. True, the charges had not been fully proven and he had been acquitted, but a lingering suspicion hovered over his name. Neither of these men was of the character usually appointed to the Guards.

The Court grumbled, but Lord Ashley was not the manner of man to be perturbed over mere grumblings and the Court was forced to console itself with the reflection that the two unpopular appointments were, after all, only likely to prove temporary ones.

In addition to this there were other and more momentous matters attracting the attention of the Court gossips. There were rumors — vague, undefined but persistent — of trouble brewing in the country at large. The Reactionists, it was asserted, were showing unusual activity of late; several quite prominent men, it was said, were under suspicion of secretly fomenting insurrectionary movements and certain startling discoveries in this connection had lately been made, thanks to the energy of Lord Ashley, assisted by the mysterious Mr. Kearns, who seemed to be in such close touch with the King. In fact, Mr.

Kearns had come to be regarded as one possessed of secret power and high influence and was the recipient of numerous distinguished attentions forthwith. Various persons attached to the Court sought him out, entered into conversation and angled energetically for information. Lady Brooke, in particular, diligently pumped him for a long half-hour as to what he knew regarding the mysterious disappearance of Captain Stanley Mortimer. Mr. Kearns listened placidly; uttered solemn generalities and told nothing. With Lady Brooke he did go so far as to inform her that he would furnish her with the information she desired "in due course," with which answer, in spite of further energetic probings, my Lady Brooke had to rest content. The result was that Mr. Kearns was put down as a man who knew more than he would tell and as a very wise person generally. He was by no means the first with whom a well-assumed air of reticence and oracular solemnity have passed for deep wisdom.

It was further whispered that Lord Ashley and Mr. Kearns were working hand in hand in the matter of the suspected conspiracies and that startling disclosures were before long to be anticipated.

Like most rumors, the ones in question possessed a certain percentage of truth and fact mixed with a far larger percentage of fiction.

It was indeed true that Kearns had been taken in high favor by the King. Whether it was Mr. Kearns's particular aptitude for impressing people, or whether it was due to some peculiar intuition, the fact remained that His Majesty entertained the belief that he was the one man above all others suited to occupy the position of his confidential Secret Service Chief and that it was he who was destined to unravel the various mysteries with which His Majesty had

in the past been annoyed. There was this much to be said in favor of Kearns — he was free from any political affiliations and could not by any possibility be mixed up with any Court, or outside, influences: an extremely desirable man, therefore, from this viewpoint alone.

As for Mr. Kearns, he maintained much the same demeanor and policy with the King that he had adopted when under the interrogatory fire of individual members of the Court. As a result of the last visitation, the King had found in his chamber another threatening document, which set forth that this was the final warning; that only a few days' grace was accorded for his compliance with previous demands and that, failing this, the impending doom would descend.

The King wanted to know many particulars: the disappearance of Captain Mortimer; the wounding of Captain Swords.

Kearns adhered staunchly and steadfastly to his invariable rule never to make partial disclosures; never to say anything until his case was complete. There was really much to commend itself in this plan. Every additional person to whom information was imparted, he considered, created an additional chance of a leak; again, if by any chance one was on the wrong track one could retrace one's steps without letting anyone know of the error into which one had fallen and thus lessening confidence generally and the illusion as to one's infallibility. But the feature which, perhaps, weighed most of all with Mr. Kearns was that a case told bit by bit, lost much of the dramatic sensationalism accompanying the disclosure of the completed investigation. And Mr. Kearns loved sensationalism and dramatic effect. He was an artist who sought to flash up the lights suddenly upon his

mise en scène, and the groupings after discovery, the false scents followed up, the wrong suspicions, the mistakes and all the precise methods employed finally to reach the truth were so much paraphernalia of the completed production which he desired to keep out of sight.

Following his system he had told the King practically nothing, except that "satisfactory progress" was being made and that he would be prepared to submit a completed case "in due course." The wounding of Captain Swords and the disappearance of Captain Mortimer were incidents concerning which he would prefer not to furnish information at the present stage. All would be duly disclosed when the case was completed. At this the King had frowned, but Mr. Kearns was firm. The understanding when he had taken up the matter was that he should be permitted to employ his own methods — methods which had been tested and had proved successful in the past — and unless he were permitted to follow out these methods, he would not be answerable for results and would prefer to be relieved from further prosecution of the inquiry. As the King was intensely eager for the successful prosecution of the inquiry, and as Kearns was a man who spoke with confidence in his ultimate success, the King arrived at the conclusion that it was best to permit him to pursue matters in his own peculiar way. Should his predictions ultimately turn out a mere fiasco, the royal favor could be withdrawn and Kearns driven forth in disgrace.

Lord Ashley, too, had approached Kearns, intimating diplomatically that they work together. Faced with this situation, Kearns rapidly cast matters over in his mind and decided to adhere to his customary policy. He could see nothing to be gained by filter-

ing out such information as he possessed to Lord Ashley; on the other side, there might be distinct disadvantages in disclosing his hand and showing how little he so far really held there Lord Ashley had, therefore, failed to secure anything from Kearns, which circumstance he seemed to accept with rather bad grace.

As a matter of fact, Kearns was sorely puzzled. Summing up all he really knew, it amounted to but little. He knew how the visitations by the enemies of the King were contrived, but as to who these enemies were, where they lurked and what their resources and objects were, he was still in the dark. He shrewdly surmised the facts of the attempt upon the life of Captain Swords; still that was a mere collateral incident and did not avail him to any appreciable extent. Lastly, he knew the details accompanying the disappearance of Captain Mortimer, but with the possession of these details his knowledge in that direction reached its limit.

What had become of Captain Mortimer and Professor Dean? Kearns felt he had made a very close guess as to the actual truth. That they had met with some disaster to their air-ship and been hurled to destruction was, of course, possible; but Kearns did not accept this theory. He had the utmost confidence in the Professor. He was a cautious man; knew well what he was about; had made careful tests of his air-ship, and had said it could fly. This was enough to convince Kearns. Besides, if an accident had happened, news of it from some source would have been had. In this way Kearns deduced the truth, though for him it was only a theory that in following up the pursuit they had either been led into some trap or else overpowered by those whom they followed and made prisoners.

Kearns had not been blind to this latter possibility from the beginning. The danger of it had occupied his attention long before the Professor and Mortimer had started, but it was a danger he saw no way of averting under the circumstances. There was nothing to be done but to run the risk.

And now this very possibility which he had foreseen, but could not provide against, appeared to have come to pass! What was to be done?

He had an ingenious but elaborate scheme of his own by which the missing ones might possibly be traced, but he laid it aside as one involving the expenditure of too much time and affording too many chances of failure. He preferred to wait quietly in the expectant hope that matters would presently take a turn his way. Captain Mortimer, he argued, was a man of energy, determination and courage; the Professor was full of scientific resources. He had faith in these qualities of his two associates; he had an abiding faith, too, in his own good luck, which had rarely deserted him at a critical point. Whether it was a species of intuition or whether it was simply confidence bred from past successes he knew not, but something within him seemed to say that the right policy was to watch quietly and wait and things would yet come his way.

But how long that might take and how long the King's patience would hold out, were knotty questions which sorely perplexed Mr. Kearns.

He was aware from certain news which reached him and certain observations that, since his refusal to indulge in disclosures, Lord Ashley was doing active work in various directions, employing for this purpose the men of the regular Secret Service. Kearns had had certain men of the Secret Service assigned to him by the King, in case he should have

use for their services. These men regarded him as their possible future chief and were anxious enough to serve him. They brought him reports, therefore, of the efforts of Lord Ashley which were then being made through their fellows. They also brought him news concerning the restlessness and discontent prevalent throughout the country, which appeared to have been largely fomented by the grasping operations of various great Trusts, inflicting such hardships on the people as to make them desperate. A peculiar and suspicious circumstance, too, was the organizing, arming and drilling of many new military bodies, formed ostensibly as auxiliary volunteer regiments. There seemed to be a peculiar free-masonry about them which rendered it practically impossible for any stranger to enroll among them and so discover something more definite as to their true internal affairs. All this, Kearns was aware, was known to Lord Ashley, who in addition had further information which had not yet reached him.

It was, therefore, no great surprise to him when on the morning of the sixth day after the departure of the Dean air-ship, the King sent for him and opened the interview by announcing that Lord Ashley had succeeded in making important discoveries. Kearns, with an air of well-assumed indifference, inquired if he might venture to ask what these discoveries might be. His Majesty was pleased to smile indulgently and reply that Lord Ashley seemed to be rivaling Kearns in the matter of reticence. Certain facts, however, His Majesty was willing to impart to Kearns. They might, he suggested, assist his investigations and, if their views were agreed, he might see his way to co-operating with Lord Ashley.

His Majesty then gave the information that Lord Ashley had made discoveries convincing him that

certain conspiracies were hatching and certain seditious movements on foot. Lord Ashley had information showing Captain Stanley Mortimer's participation in these treasonable transactions. He had, in fact, aided and abetted the enemies of the King upon the occasion of their last visitation to the palace and, believing he had been seen and recognized by Captain Swords, had shot the latter and escaped, never to return, or else, learning that no suspicion had attached itself to him on account of the Swords incident, he would return and tender some specious pretext for his absence. Of course, his presence in the palace would be a danger and a menace.

Kearns listened to the end. Only the august presence in which he stood prevented him from laughing outright.

"And are these the disclosures Lord Ashley made to you, Sire?" asked Kearns, with a cynical smile.

"Such is, in brief, part of the report," said the King. "What have you to say to it?"

"Simply this, Sire," answered Kearns; "it shows how grievously a man will blunder when he dabbles in an art he doesn't understand."

"Ah, you differ with Lord Ashley?"

"Not only differ with him, Sire," replied Kearns boldly, "but I pronounce him wholly and utterly wrong. Why, Captain Swords himself can assure you of this!"

"Captain Swords," said the King, "did not see his assailant and is himself, I am informed, entirely deceived as to Captain Mortimer."

"I beg to assure you, Sire," declared Kearns earnestly, "that Captain Mortimer has been guilty of no conspiracy, or other seditious act. He is one of the bravest and most loyal officers in Your

Majesty's service. You have been utterly misled in this matter."

"You speak with such conviction," said the King, "that your words carry weight with us. Still, we would learn the reasons with which you support your assertions."

"When I assumed this task, Sire," replied Kearns, "it was with the express stipulation that I should be permitted to adopt my own methods. I must beg you, Sire, to permit me to withhold my report until I can present a completed case."

"Be it as you ask, then," said the King, with a slight frown. "We would not have it in your power to ascribe failure to any interference you had met with. In the meantime, you must not be astonished if we give ear and weight to the disclosures of Lord Ashley. He, at least, brings some news and that news we regard as of sufficient importance to warrant the apprehension of Captain Mortimer and we have so ordered."

Kearns visibly expressed his astonishment.

"Captain Mortimer," continued the King, "has, we are aware, performed gallant military service and his arrest has been so ordered as to preserve due secrecy and not injure his career should it develop, as you pretend, that a mistake has been made."

"It most assuredly has, Sire," replied Kearns.

"When you are prepared to furnish proof of that fact," rejoined the King, "the order can be rescinded. Until then it will stand. It behooves you to hasten. We leave for our City Palace to-day but shall return here to-morrow. It would meet our pleasure and win our approval should you be prepared to furnish such proof, or other report, by to-morrow." With these words the King signified that the interview was at an end.

Somewhat downcast Kearns retired to the room assigned him off the Chancellerie. The end of his rope seemed near at hand. Here was the King insisting on a report on the next day and here he was practically without news. He looked wistfully, as he had so often looked during the past few days, at the little aërestograph. Ah, if it would only bring its message!

Kearns regretted that Captain Mortimer should have been brought under suspicion so undeservedly. Lord Ashley was apparently playing a peculiar game. He wondered what that game might be. He decided it would be well to see Lord Ashley and possibly gain some further light on the subject.

With another wistful glance at the aërestograph, he walked to the door connecting his room with the main room of the Chancellerie. He opened the door, pushed aside the heavy portiere hanging before it and passed in. Lord Ashley proved to be engaged at the moment, but requested that he return in half an hour.

Kearns accordingly made his way back to his room. As he entered he halted abruptly and his heart gave a great bound. The aërestograph was vigorously signaling for someone to receive a message.

With an effort he controlled his excitement, ran to the instrument and signaled back. Communication established, Dean's message began to come. His recent interview with the King in mind, Kearns sent back the warning message.

In his excitement Kearns could hardly refrain from executing a few fancy steps. This very night amid the sheltering trees at the further end of the Queen's Walk, he would know all! Truly, the news came in the nick of time! At last fortune was smiling sweetly!

It was with buoyant spirits that Kearns went to his interview with Lord Ashley half an hour later. The Chancellor met him coldly and proved extremely reticent. Finally Kearns touched upon the subject of Captain Mortimer and assured him that he was making a serious mistake in his accusation. Lord Ashley listened to his assurances with cold cynicism. He replied shortly that he well knew what he was doing and would be personally answerable for any mistakes made. At this reply, Mr. Kearns felt himself growing warm behind the ears and somewhat brusquely rejoined that in this particular case the noble lord did not know what he was doing. To this Milord Ashley retorted with a sneer that he believed one would not need to know much concerning Captain Mortimer to be in possession of more information on the subject than Mr. Kearns held.

"Ah, you really think so!" exclaimed Kearns, becoming suddenly cool. "It is as serious a mistake as the other."

"Indeed!" retorted Lord Ashley with the same sneer.

"Yes," rejoined Kearns, "and it may interest you to learn that I have within the past few minutes been in direct communication with Captain Mortimer. It is only a question of hours when he will present himself here to confront you and answer to the King!"

And while the expression of astonishment which this very positive announcement created still lingered upon Lord Ashley's features, Mr. Kearns bowed politely and with a satisfied and triumphant smile withdrew.

Punctual to the stroke, he repaired at midnight to the appointed spot at the end of the Queen's Walk and found Mortimer and Dean already awaiting him.

"When did you arrive?" asked Kearns, after the first greetings.

"Only a few minutes ago," answered the Professor. "We came back very slowly, purposely delaying our arrival until after nightfall, in accordance with your instructions."

"And what have you done with the air-ship?"

"We had to descend within the park itself," replied Dean, "otherwise we could not have got past the sentries. The air-ship is concealed among the trees near the river. It will be safe enough until morning."

Without further delay, Mortimer and Dean told Kearns all the events in connection with their capture and escape, and what they had learned during their detention. All they suppressed was any information as to the precise location of the valley. Kearns listened intently, asking various questions. He was now, indeed, in a position to present a completed case! Here was information, in truth, for His Majesty, the King! How the puny disclosures of Milord Ashley would pale into insignificance beside such disclosures as these!

Kearns, in turn, narrated the events which had occurred at the palace since their departure — the wounding of Captain Swords, who was rapidly recovering; the death of the Duke of Marquanna; the elevation of Lord Ashley to the office of Chancellor; the investigations started and accusations launched by the latter, and the order of arrest issued against Mortimer.

The latter was naturally both astonished and indignant, but not so much so as Dean, in the light of his past experiences with him, would have expected. After listening to the end of Kearns's recital, he said that he strongly suspected Lord Ashley of personal

motives in giving credence to these suspicions. Lord Ashley, in his present position as Chancellor, was possessed of a great deal of power and they must act cleverly and cautiously. The best to be done was to secure, as quickly as possible, an audience with the King and explain to him all. In any event, Mortimer insisted it was his duty to communicate promptly to the King his knowledge of the revolutionary movement. Whether the threatened attack took place as predicted or not, the King must be speedily apprized.

But the King's absence until the morrow made immediate communication impossible. Kearns suggested that Mortimer and Dean retire to a neighboring village until the following day. Immediately the King returned, he would arrange an interview for Mortimer. In this plan Mortimer refused to acquiesce. He said that as an order of arrest had been issued against him, it was his duty, as a military officer, to surrender at once. He did not care to play the fugitive even for one night. Besides, he added, what difference did it make? It was only a question of a few hours and, although a prisoner, he would be made as comfortable as in his own quarters and would be treated with the consideration due to an officer of the Guard.

As Mortimer could not be dissuaded from his views on this point, it was finally decided that he should come forward at once and subject himself to arrest and that Kearns should return as quietly as possible with Dean to the palace. Immediately upon the arrival of the King upon the following day, Kearns was to see His Majesty and impart to him such information as would lead to Mortimer being accorded a prompt interview.

This plan having been decided upon, they walked

together along the further end of the park toward one of the entrances. Presently Mortimer stopped and, taking leave of them, went forward alone.

"Who goes there!" came the challenge of the sentinel.

"Officer of the Guard," replied Mortimer.

"Advance, Officer of the Guard, and give the countersign."

Mortimer walked up to the sentry-box and the soldier, recognizing his officer, smartly brought his carbine to the salute.

"Send for the officer of the day," ordered Mortimer.

The soldier reached into the sentry-box and touched a signal.

A few moments later Captain Bingham appeared. There was a cordial greeting on both sides and then Captain Bingham leaned forward and whispered something close to Mortimer's ear.

"Yes, I know!" interrupted Mortimer, and arm in arm they strolled away in the direction of the military quarters.

CHAPTER VII

FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

"So he has returned?" said Lady Brooke.

"Yes," replied Lord Ashley, "and is a prisoner. I hold him in my grasp."

"I don't like that last," said Lady Brooke. "It sounds vindictive. By the way, I may say frankly that it's well he returned just when he did. I was beginning to grow suspicious."

"Suspicious, Milady? Of what, may I ask?"

"Of you," retorted Lady Brooke, with unabashed frankness. "I don't forget that though we work together, yet your interests in this matter are somewhat different from mine. It would doubtless suit you well enough if he were put out of the way for good and all, but that's no part of my plan. My compact was only for a temporary injury — one that it would be possible to repair readily."

"It seems to me, Milady, that you always were somewhat given to suspicion," retorted Lord Ashley, with a slight sneer.

Lady Brooke reddened and an angry light shone in her eyes.

"It may be well," she said slowly, "for you to remember, Milord, that I expect any compact you may make with me to be kept fully and fairly. Chancellors may be made," she continued with emphasis, "and they may also be unmade, if history records aright. I have still some influence near the Throne, as those who care to question it may find."

"Royalty, it is said, is rarely grateful for past favors, but I will admit there are exceptions, Milady," said Lord Ashley in honeyed accents.

"Would you care to measure how much that influence is a matter of the past?" asked Lady Brooke, with concentrated anger. "Would it astonish you, perhaps, to discover that influence to be greater to-day than ever?"

"Ah, a dual influence!" exclaimed Lord Ashley. "You have in mind, no doubt, your charming protégée, the beautiful Miss Cameron, lately presented by you at Court and incidentally to the attention of His Majesty."

"Enough!" exclaimed Lady Brooke, her anger flashing suddenly into flame; "since you dare ——"

"There, there!" interrupted Lord Ashley soothingly. "Don't let us quarrel. I have no intention of questioning your power, past or present, Milady, nor do I seek to have that power turned against me. I have enemies enough already. Won't you now listen to my plan?"

"What is it?" asked Lady Brooke, still angry, but grown suddenly wary.

"This," said Lord Ashley: "At fifteen and a half o'clock to-day, Captain Haslam, who is the officer of the day, will receive an order bearing the Royal seal, to release Captain Mortimer. This order he will immediately execute and then proceed to destroy the order and forget that he ever received such document. As you know, Captain Haslam is one of my appointees and he can be trusted implicitly to carry out my commands. The same messenger who carries the order of release will leave for Captain Mortimer a letter, requesting him to proceed at once to the little summer house on Antler Hill, a short distance away in the Park, where he will meet the friend who has

procured his release and learn matters of importance to him. Do you follow me thus far, Milady?"

"Yes, yes," hastily assented Lady Brooke.

"Gratified over this sudden release," continued Lord Ashley, "and curious to ascertain who this friend may be and what is to be imparted to him, it is only natural to infer that Captain Mortimer will lose no time in making his way to the rendezvous. Needless to say that the friend he will find there will be — you."

"Yes," assented Lady Brooke. "Continue."

"You will inform him," proceeded Lord Ashley, "that he is the victim of a court intrigue; that the King's mind is poisoned against him for the time being and that he is in serious danger; that you, knowing this, have secured his release by a forged order; that his only safety lies in temporary flight and concealment and that, if he will follow your instructions, you can surely promise him that within two short months all danger will have disappeared, when he will be restored to royal favor and appointed to the Colonelcy of any one of the crack cavalry regiments he may select — outside of the Guards. By this plan," continued Lord Ashley, "we both attain our ends — the temporary removal of the gallant Captain from the atmosphere of the Court; and you, in addition, secure control of his person and movements to do with him practically as you will."

"But suppose he should refuse the bait?" inquired Lady Brooke. "Suppose he elects to stay and face the danger?"

"Ah, that is a matter, Milady, which it seems to me lies with you!" protested Lord Ashley. "I really think you estimate your powers of persuasion and of — of — attraction too lightly."

"But suppose he should refuse?" persisted Lady Brooke. "What then?"

"Then," replied Lord Ashley, "I don't see that we shall be any worse off than before. If he refuse, he will simply return to the military quarters and surrender himself once more. It will be time enough then to put our heads together and see what further we can do, but by trying this present plan it affords us at least a chance of success. Remember that he must have heard something of your influence at Court and you are certainly holding out a very brilliant inducement to him."

"Well, I am willing to try," said Lady Brooke, with determination. "We shall see what will come of it."

"And you will succeed!" declared Lord Ashley, with conviction. "I am positive we shall both succeed!"

Lady Brooke had been gone but a few minutes when Captain Haslam was anounced.

"Captain Haslam," said Lord Ashley, "at fifteen and a half o'clock to-day, or perhaps even a little earlier, an order will be presented to you for the release of Captain Stanley Mortimer, accompanied with a letter for him. You will have that letter delivered to him at once and you will immediately release the prisoner. The instant he leaves the quarters, you will destroy the order and, under any and all circumstances, you will forever forget that such an order has ever reached your hands. Whenever the question comes up as to the disposition of this prisoner, he has escaped. You clearly understand?"

"I clearly understand, Milord," answered Captain Haslam, as he saluted and retired.

Lord Ashley's next visitor was Captain Bagley.

"Captain," said Lord Ashley abruptly, "you are

called upon for a certain service of state, such as occasionally arises in the affairs of government. Upon your faithful and discreet performance of that service depends the matter of future favors and promotion."

Captain Bagley bowed low, maintaining a respectful silence.

"Your orders are these," continued Lord Ashley: "At fifteen o'clock to-day you will proceed to a point in the park where you can observe the Summer house upon Antler Hill. Conceal yourself from observation among the trees, or bushes. At about fifteen and three-quarters o'clock you will observe an escaped prisoner walking along the Stag Walk toward Antler Hill. That escaped prisoner will be Captain Stanley Mortimer. Permit him to proceed to Antler Hill, where he will be met by a certain personage, whom it is not your concern to recognize. Should he leave Antler Hill in company with that personage, you will permit him to go unhindered on his way. Should he leave alone and seek to return in the direction of the military quarters, or the palace, then your instructions are different. Do you understand thus far?"

"Fully, Milord!" answered Captain Bagley.

"Should he start to return," continued Lord Ashley, "he cannot possibly do so until sixteen o'clock, or later. The moment sixteen o'clock has sounded and you find him upon the return journey, you will come upon him and shoot him dead. You understand?"

"Fully!" repeated Captain Bagley.

"Your excuse will be that he was an escaping prisoner and that your life was in danger. For the rest, you may look to me to protect you fully in your action."

Captain Bagly bowed.

"You notice here," continued Lord Ashley, pointing to an instrument beside the wall, with a large reflector above it, "the sigmagraph. As you know, it is used to signal the guard house to turn out a guard of honor and salute when some visitor of rank is about to leave the Chancellerie. Five flashes of the sigmagraph are the signal for the guard; any smaller number are mere test signals. At sixteen o'clock, precisely to the last stroke, you will turn your eyes to the signal receiver upon the roof of the military quarters. Should no signal come, you will follow out the instructions given. Should you notice three flashes from the sigmagraph, then your orders are cancelled and the escaping prisoner is to be permitted to pass unhindered. Are these instructions clear to you?"

"Entirely, Milord!" answered Captain Bagley.

"And I can count upon your faithful and discreet performance?"

"Absolutely, Milord!"

"It is well, then," said Lord Ashley. "Remember that neither His Majesty, nor the Chancellerie, is unmindful of service and that due reward attends those who serve His Majesty and His Majesty's Government faithfully and well. No better service can be done than to exterminate, if needs be, traitors and hatchers of treason. I make myself clear to you in this?"

"Nothing could be clearer, Milord!"

"It would not astonish me, Captain, to see you one day at the head of a Division."

"I shall ever strive to earn your approval, Milord Chancellor!" replied Captain Bagley, as he saluted and retired.

While Lord Ashley was thus occupied in issuing

instructions Mr. Kearns was busily engaged in endeavoring to get in touch with the King. After diligent inquiry, he ascertained that His Majesty had left the City Palace and was then upon the return journey. It was, however, not His Majesty's intention to return direct, but to stop en route at Fairoaks, the country estate of Sir Foxhall Sharpe, some thirty miles from the Summer Palace, where a garden-party to be attended by the King, the Queen and the Court was to be held that afternoon. It was rumored in Court circles that the real attraction of the garden party was a certain Miss Cameron, to whom recently had been drawn the attention of the King. The Queen, it was said, had in consequence of the presence of this Miss Cameron among the guests been with difficulty induced to lend her presence, only consenting finally in order to prevent the appearance of a public scandal.

Kearns secured a phaeromobile from the royal garage and hurried off to Fairoaks, passing as he went a number of court mobiles on the way to the garden-party. Reaching Fairoaks, he found that the King had arrived, but had retired to rest after his journey. His Majesty had given orders that he was not to be disturbed.

It was only after a long and weary wait of more than two hours that Kearns succeeded in getting his urgent message to the King. His Majesty sent for him at once, but received him with some show of impatience.

"Well," said the King, "we assume that your case is completed at last and that it must be both interesting and important to be forced upon our attention at the present time!"

"The case is fully completed, Sire," answered Kearns, "and in importance will not, I think, dis-

appoint your expectations. I am prepared to report now."

"Not now," interrupted the King. "We would prefer to learn the details at the palace — upon our return."

"But the matters I have to impart, Sire, are most pressing — most urgent!"

"So are matters here," exclaimed the King, with a peculiar smile. "Certain rumors — as wicked as they are unfounded — have, it has reached our ears, been set afloat and have deeply shocked us. It has become necessary by our presence here, and that of Her Majesty, to discountenance these scandalous gossipings."

Mr. Kearns could accommodate his intelligence to that which was required of him as well as the next man. He accordingly contrived to inject into his countenance the necessary quantum of astonishment and indignation and having done this, he promptly returned to the charge.

"It becomes my duty to report to you, Sire," he said, "that danger threatens and that an armed attack is projected."

It was the King's turn to look startled and astonished.

"When?" he asked.

"Possibly within three days."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Positive!"

"And can you confirm your facts?"

"Absolutely."

"How?"

"Through Captain Stanley Mortimer and another."

"You are sure of this?"

"Entirely so."

"Ah!"

The King remained for a moment in deep thought.

"Three days," he murmured. "That will give all the time required for any concentration of our forces which may be necessary. Two hours cannot make much difference in these preparations. We will remain here for that time and then return to the palace."

"In view of the character of my information," persisted Kearns, "I urge you, Sire, to the utmost expedition. I beg you to release Captain Mortimer at once and to send for him and hear his story."

"No," answered the King, "to leave here thus suddenly would create much undesirable speculation and gossip. This you shall do. We will sign the order for Captain Mortimer's release, which you shall bear to him at once. Direct him to repair to the palace and hold himself in readiness for an immediate audience. When you have done this, you will hasten back here and report. By that time we shall be prepared to return to our palace and listen to the full details of this news. You may now go and carry out these instructions."

"You have not yet given me, Sire, the order for Captain Mortimer's release."

The King crossed to a writing-table, hastily wrote the requisite order and handed it to Kearns.

"We would not lightly affront our Chancellor," he said. "You will, therefore, keep Captain Mortimer discreetly out of sight until our return and until we have gathered from his story whether this release is fully warranted by the facts. Should you chance to meet our Chancellor, tell him nothing of this release, but bid him summon General Pierson, in command of the First Army Corps, to the palace. Go now, and upon your return here you will find us fully ready to proceed."

Kearns bowed and retired. He made his way through the gardens, and, stepping into his phaeromobile, started on the return journey to the palace.

As Mr. Kearns passed through the gardens of Fairoaks, he had noticed among the guests Miss Dorothy Brandon and Miss Beatrice Cuming. They also had seen him and had bowed. Just as Kearns passed out of the grounds, Lady Hill, one of Her Majesty's ladies-in-waiting, came hurrying forward and greeted Dorothy.

"I have been looking all over for you," said Lady Hill. "I bring you an order from the Queen."

"Yes?" answered Dorothy. "What is it?"

"You are to return at once to the palace," said Lady Hill, "and present yourself at the Chancellerie. The Chancellor desires to see you upon urgent matters."

Dorothy seemed both startled and astonished.

"The Chancellor desires to see me!" she exclaimed. "What can it be about? I would prefer not to go."

"Not go!" answered Lady Hill, who was a great stickler for etiquette, evidently quite shocked. "Why, my dear, this is a royal command I bring you."

"But what can the Chancellor want to see me about?" persisted Dorothy.

"I don't know," replied Lady Hill, "except that it is a matter of state. The Chancellor's request was addressed to the Queen, in the usual form — you being attached to Her Majesty's suite — and the Chancellor urgently asks your attendance at once. The Queen, of course, immediately gave this order which I bring you."

"I would much prefer not to go," said Dorothy.

"But for what reason?" demanded Lady Hill.

"Oh, it would be much nicer to remain here," answered Dorothy vaguely. "Don't you think I might seek audience with the Queen and ask her to withdraw the order?"

"Certainly not!" said Lady Hill severely. "Such a proceeding would be entirely improper and contrary to Court etiquette."

"Well, but could I not," persisted Dorothy, "endeavor to arrange this matter, whatever it is, with the Chancellor over the audiphone?"

"I am not familiar with the etiquette of the Chancellor," said Lady Hill frostily; "but I fancy that the Chancellor does not usually discuss matters of state over the audiphone. As a maid of honor attached to Her Majesty's suite, it is your duty not to quibble over the orders of the Sovereign, but to obey."

"Very well," answered Dorothy resignedly. "I shall go at once. Will you come with me, Trixy?"

"Certainly, my dear," replied Beatrice.

"It's too bad we have to go," remarked Dorothy as they made their way through the grounds. "I understand there is going to be a splendid entertainment given later in the afternoon under the supervision of Sir Richard Hollowboy, the famous Director of Plastics."

"Yes, it is indeed too bad!" assented Beatrice.

"Well," continued Dorothy, "I did my best to get out of it."

"You certainly did," acquiesced Beatrice, "but there's no escape. Well, don't let's mind! What can't be cured must be endured, I suppose!"

They reached the highway, stepped into their victoriamobile and were off. And thus it happened that the two ladies were following Mr. Kearns on the highway leading back to the palace.

As for Mr. Kearns he traveled back at a rate of

speed which, unused as he was to such celerity in an open vehicle of this description, suggested to him ideas that should any sudden breakdown, or other mishap occur there would be little left of him or the vehicle from which to pick out the tale. He experienced, however, a sense of buoyancy and exhilaration from this rapid flashing through the air. He was glad, though, of the wise provision which divided the Northbound and Southbound roads, thus obviating at least any possibility of collision.

Without accident or further adventure he reached the Palace Park and springing out of the phaeromobile, he ordered the man in charge to hold himself in readiness for the return journey to Fairoaks. Striding rapidly toward the military quarters, he was within a few steps of the main entrance when, to his unbounded astonishment, he saw advancing toward him Captain Stanley Mortimer.

"How is it you are here?" exclaimed Mr. Kearns in amazement.

"I've just been favored with an order of release," said Mortimer, smiling.

"How did you manage it?" asked Kearns.

"I don't quite know, except that the order was from the King," answered Mortimer. "But come this way; I've something to show you."

He passed his arm through that of Kearns and led him a short distance away from the military quarters and out into the park.

"This whole affair has happened in a most curious way," he said. "A few minutes ago I was notified of the arrival of the order of release and at the same time this note was given me. It's really quite curious! Read for yourself!"

Kearns took the paper handed to him and read:

"When these lines reach you, they will be ac-

companied by an order for your release. This order has been secured by a true and devoted friend, who desires to see you at once for the purpose of conveying to you information which it is of the highest importance you should learn at once. The moment you are released proceed to the summer-house on Antler Hill, where you will find this friend anxiously awaiting you. You ought to reach there by sixteen o'clock or a little earlier."

Twice Mr. Kearns read the note over carefully and then paused thoughtfully for some moments.

"Well!" he said at last.

"Well — what?" exclaimed Captain Mortimer questioningly.

"What are you going to do?" asked Kearns.

"Why," exclaimed Mortimer in some astonishment, "I'm going to Antler Hill, I suppose. Why should I not go?"

"Because I scent a trap of some kind!" replied Kearns with conviction.

"A trap!" exclaimed Mortimer. "You do, eh?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm astonished," exclaimed Mortimer, "but I do not know that I should hold back. If a friend awaits me there, I wouldn't like to appear ungrateful, and if it is, as you suspect, an enemy, I've never yet hesitated to meet my enemies. What makes you think it is a trap?"

"Why so much mystery about this missive? Why is it unsigned? Why should this friend conceal his name from you?" asked Kearns vehemently.

"Well," answered Mortimer musingly, "there is some force in what you say, and yet one can imagine reasons why a friend might not sign such a communication, especially when his identity is about to be revealed in the course of an hour."

"You say the order of release was from the King?"

"Yes."

"Then I can assure you," continued Kearns earnestly, "there is something wrong about this whole transaction. I have here, as you see, an order for your release given direct into my hands by the King. I came here in all haste the moment after receiving it. I am convinced that the King has issued no other order of the same kind and that there is something wrong in connection with that other order which released you."

"This looks indeed strange!" admitted Mortimer, with a serious air.

"Furthermore," resumed Kearns, "when the King gave me that order, it was entrusted to me with the condition that I keep you quietly in the background until the King received you in audience and judged matters for himself. I accepted the order under this condition and I feel bound by it."

"That entirely alters the complexion of matters," declared Mortimer. "I would not willingly by any act of mine place you in a false position. But won't you go to Antler Hill and explain to the person who may be waiting there why it is I am unable to appear in person? Any danger which may await me would surely not extend to you."

"I would only too gladly go," replied Kearns, "but I'm ordered to return to the King as soon as I have you in readiness for the coming audience. I don't care to send another to the summer-house, though I am most curious to learn who may be the person awaiting you there."

"And so am I!"

"Well, don't worry," retorted Kearns. "Friend or foe, you may depend upon it we shall discover

who that person is before long. As you know, I have had some experience in matters of this kind."

"What is it, then, you wish me to do now?" asked Mortimer.

"Accompany me to the palace," replied Kearns. "I shall leave you in my private bureau in the Chancellerie until the time comes for your audience with the King."

"I am at your disposition," answered Mortimer simply.

"One question I want to ask you," said Kearns. "Have you communicated with anybody since your return?"

"With no one," replied Mortimer. "I was naturally not anxious to advertise the fact of my being under arrest."

"That was very wise," remarked Kearns. "Now let us go."

They accordingly made their way direct to the palace and entered Kearns's bureau off the main room of the Chancellerie.

"Now," exclaimed Kearns, "I invite you to make yourself as comfortable as possible here until audience time comes. It will be only a couple of hours or so."

"Very well," assented Mortimer cheerfully.

"More than this," continued Kearns, "knowing your propensity for running into adventures of various kinds and in view of my promise to the King, I am going to ask you to pledge me your word of honor that you won't leave this room during the next two hours."

"Ah," demurred Mortimer, smiling; "that's a hard promise to exact. Who can tell what may turn up within two hours?"

"Well," assented Kearns, "I will allow you to

make your promise with the qualification: Except in case of possible life or death. I have, then, your word?"

"Have it your own way, since you insist," exclaimed Mortimer. "Yes; you have my word that I will not cross the threshold of this room within the next two hours, unless it is a question of possible life or death."

"Now I can proceed upon my errand with a mind at ease," said Kearns, with a satisfied air. "Oh, by the way, I had almost forgotten! I have a message from the King for Lord Ashley."

As he spoke, he walked to the door of communication, pushed aside the heavy portiere, opened the door, threw aside the corresponding portiere on the other side and passed into the main room of the Chancellerie.

A moment later he returned, with preoccupied air. "Nobody there!" he exclaimed. "It's a holiday and everybody has taken advantage of it. Well, I'm off to Fairoaks now. Within two hours I expect I shall be back and — so will the King!" With these words he hurried from the room and away.

After Kearns's departure, Mortimer strolled to the window and looked over the park. Then he stretched himself out comfortably with a book and read. He had been reading but a very short time, when voices came to him from the adjoining main room of the Chancellerie. An instant later he sprang to his feet, a flood of color flushing his face. In returning from the Chancellerie to his bureau, Mr. Kearns had failed fully to close the door of communication and now only the two portieres intervened between the rooms. Do what he would, Mortimer could not but hear.

More distinctly came the voices to him, as the

minutes passed. He stood with strained features and eyes ablaze. Then his hand flew to his sword-hilt and he strode forward. Two steps he took and abruptly halted.

Merciful God! Why was he thus chained here? Why had he pledged his word, except under stress of possible life or death, not to cross the threshold of this room?

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE CHANCELLERIE

"His Excellency, the Chancellor, desires to see Miss Brandon upon official business and alone," said the messenger.

"You will wait for me, Trixy?" asked Dorothy of her companion.

"I have a letter to send off, dear," answered Beatrice, "and I will go to your desk and write it. I suppose you will be back to me before I have finished."

"Yes, yes," assented Dorothy, with preoccupied air, as she turned to the messenger and indicated her readiness to follow him.

Lord Ashley received her in the main room of the Chancellerie. The messenger who ushered her in withdrew, and they were alone.

Lord Ashley advanced with deferential courtesy to receive her and led her to a seat at the head of a long, highly-polished table in the centre of the room. He drew up a chair and seated himself at the side of the table, in order to bring himself almost face to face with her.

"I must beg your forgiveness, Miss Brandon," he began, "for having thus hastily asked your attendance. I trust you will not regret too much having missed the pleasures of the garden-party."

"I confess," answered Dorothy, "I was astonished upon learning the urgency of your summons and quite unable to guess its cause. Even now I—"

"You are still at a loss," rejoined Lord Ashley promptly, as she hesitated. "It may be summed up in two words—official business."

"Official business!" repeated Dorothy. "So the message said. But what possible connection can there be between me and the official business of the Chancellerie?"

"It does seem peculiar, doesn't it?" laughed Lord Ashley pleasantly, "but that is precisely what I am about to explain to you. There is a matter regarding which you can, perhaps, furnish me with some information—information which has only an indirect bearing, no doubt, but which may possibly be of some value to His Majesty's Government."

"Indeed? To what does this matter relate?"

"It is connected with the recent disappearance of Captain Stanley Mortimer."

Dorothy started and perceptibly changed color.

"You astonish me!" she exclaimed. "In what way can I possibly assist you in this?"

"You remember the occasion of the last Court ball?" asked Lord Ashley.

"Yes."

"That night was also the occasion of the wounding of Captain Swords and of the disappearance of Captain Mortimer, as you will recall."

"Yes."

"The last known appearance in public of Captain Mortimer," continued Lord Ashley, "was at the ball, where he had the honor of dancing with you."

"Yes, he danced with me."

"After which," resumed Lord Ashley, "you both made the customary promenade and conversed together."

"We passed into the royal conservatory."

"So that," said Lord Ashley, with a pleasant

smile, "you are the last person with whom Captain Mortimer is known to have been seen on that eventful night."

"I was not aware of that."

"Such is the case, however."

"Well, even so, what then——?"

"Simply this," replied Lord Ashley, with the same pleasant smile; "it has been deemed advisable to ask you if, in the course of his conversation with you that evening, Captain Mortimer permitted any remarks to fall which would tend to throw light upon his subsequent disappearance."

Dorothy paused, hesitatingly.

"Was he not engaged that night upon some special service for the King?" she asked.

"Engaged upon special service for the King!" exclaimed Lord Ashley, with a mocking laugh. "No; I regret to say that he was engaged upon very different service."

"I don't understand, Milord."

"Then I will make myself perfectly clear," said Lord Ashley, with emphasis. "Far from being engaged in His Majesty's service that night, Captain Mortimer was conspiring with and aiding the enemies of the King."

"Oh, monstrous!" exclaimed Dorothy with agitation. "I am convinced there is no truth in this."

"I would that I could join you in this belief," said Lord Ashley bitterly, "for the sake of the reputation of the army in general and of the Guards in particular. Unfortunately, the proofs in possession of His Majesty's government are conclusive. Captain Mortimer has been led from the path of his duty to King and Government—has been led to his ruin—by yielding to temptations extended by the King's enemies."

"I am convinced there is some mistake," replied Dorothy. There was a numb sensation in her brain and at her heart, yet she spoke the words bravely.

"Mistake!" repeated Lord Ashley. "Alas, no! The Government has in its possession proofs establishing Captain Mortimer's connection with certain revolutionary factions to which he has given information and active aid. A search of his quarters subsequent to his disappearance revealed the presence of plans of fortifications and schedules as to the disposition of His Majesty's forces of a most compromising character."

Dorothy had recovered from the first shock of the Chancellor's disclosures and all her senses were now alert.

"It does not seem probable," she said slowly, "that a person about to disappear would leave all these compromising matters behind, when it would have been so easy to have destroyed them."

"Ah!" retorted Lord Ashley quickly, "but this disappearance was not premeditated. The necessity for it arose suddenly and in an unforeseen manner."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," continued Lord Ashley. "Captain Mortimer was involved in the various scandalous attempts which have been made at times upon the peace and dignity of His Majesty—attempts involving the depositing of threatening and seditious documents in the royal apartments. Upon the occasion of the last of these attempts, Captain Mortimer had reason to believe he was recognized and his acts discovered by the officer on duty that night; hence the attempted assassination of Captain Swords and the sudden disappearance which followed."

Dorothy sank back in her chair, white and trembling.

"Ah!" she exclaimed with emotion, "you accuse him of murder as well as of treason!"

"Such are the facts to which the proofs in the possession of the Government point," answered Lord Ashley impressively.

"But," said Dorothy, gathering her courage and fighting on bravely, "what possible motive could Captain Mortimer have for doing these things? He is a soldier with a brilliant record; he holds an enviable position in the army; why should he do these things? What motive could there be?"

"There are circumstances and temptations which lie so far apart from you and your life, Miss Brandon," said Lord Ashley with an air of great candor, "that they are difficult to explain to you, and it is not wonderful that you should not understand them. These revolutionary movements are backed by men of large means, who have their own personal aims and ambitions. In addition to this, there are the subscriptions of disaffected masses which, when lumped together, run into vast sums. The Reactionist cause, I can assure you, does not lack money."

"I follow your words, but I don't fully understand their import," said Dorothy.

"I will be more explicit," rejoined Lord Ashley. "You asked me what could be the motive for Captain Mortimer's acts, and I answer you by saying that there are ample funds at the disposition of these revolutionists, who do not hesitate to purchase treason. Money—that magnet of temptation which has led astray so many men—was the motive. Captain Mortimer, like many other officers of the army, was addicted to heavy play; he was pressed for money and it was with money that he was debauched."

"Are there no limits to the calumnies—no depths

to the infamies charged?" cried Dorothy with indignation and despair.

"It does sound infamous," replied Lord Ashley gravely, "so infamous as to seem, to an upright mind like yours, almost incredible. But such are the facts, and these facts, as I have already had the honor of apprizing you, are supported by proofs in the possession of the Government."

"But so-called proof at times turns out to be error," retorted Dorothy.

"There are, it is true, various grades of proof," replied Lord Ashley with judicial solemnity. "In this case, the proofs in the hands of the Government are convincing. They are absolute and incontestable. There is no error."

For one brief instant Dorothy sat irresolute. Here was the Chancellor of the Empire—a man of responsibility and power—assuring her that there were incontestable proofs of guilt. He told, with judicial calmness and force, a story detailed and circumstantial of conspiracy and treason and the motive therefor. For the second time this tale of passion for play had reached her. What was she to believe? What should be her decision? Ah! the answer to her was easy; only for the briefest instant did she hesitate! How false the first accusation had proved! Had he not looked into her eyes, in the gardens of the King, and had she not felt that only honor and truth lay behind his refuting words? How she had reproached herself then for her lack of faith! Never again would she dishonor him with one thought of mistrust. Let circumstances be what they would, let suspicion point as it might, never again would she permit herself the slightest doubt! She raised her head and looked keenly at Lord Ashley.

"During this interview," she said, "you have

spoken of treason, of attempted murder and of mercenariness. You say there are proofs of these things. I can only answer you that I am convinced these proofs are false. Does Captain Swords, for instance, assert that it was Captain Mortimer who fired that shot?"

"Captain Swords did not see his assailant, although his assailant doubtless thought he did," answered Lord Ashley. "Besides, Captain Swords is as deceived as to the true character of Captain Mortimer as others have been."

"You will have to count me, then, among the friends who believe steadfastly in him as the soul of loyalty and honor!" said Dorothy with spirit. "I don't suppose," she continued, "I can dissuade you from the opinions you have formed, and I am very sure that you cannot change mine on this subject. It is painful to me to hear one whom I respect falsely accused, and I don't see what can well be gained by further discussing this matter. In fact, Milord, I don't quite understand why—why—this interview was sought."

"I have already tendered my apologies," replied Lord Ashley gently, "and explained that you were the last person with whom Captain Mortimer was seen. The Government is desirous of learning whether, during the conversation with you upon that occasion, Captain Mortimer permitted any remark to escape him which might throw any light upon the matter of this disappearance, or other acts of his."

"Captain Mortimer indulged in no such remark," answered Dorothy briefly.

"But you have already said that he told you he was engaged that night upon some special service for the King," persisted Lord Ashley.

"He did say he was engaged that night upon some

special service, but I am not sure that he added it was for the King. That, I think, was a mere inference on my part."

"And a very natural inference under the circumstances," replied Lord Ashley with warmth, "but the assertion was false!"

"I know nothing except the bare statement made to me," answered Dorothy.

"Will you not narrate the circumstances which led up to that statement?" asked Lord Ashley. "Will you not detail the entire conversation which took place between you? You see," he added, "there may have been words with little meaning for you, which nevertheless would mean much for the officers of His Majesty's Government, in view of the facts which they know and the clues which they possess."

Dorothy hesitated an instant.

"I have said to you," she replied, "that no such remarks passed between us."

"I have explained that you are scarcely in a position to judge accurately as to this," went on Lord Ashley inexorably. "Will you not repeat, for the benefit of the Government, the conversation which occurred, so that the Government may judge for itself as to this matter?"

"No," replied Dorothy coldly. "The conversation was of a private character—one with which the Government has no concern. I have assured you that no remarks such as you seek were made. Beyond this I will not go!"

"Then I am to understand," said Lord Ashley regretfully, "that you prefer to render possible aid to this traitor rather than to the King and Queen from whom you hold a post of honor and whom you profess to serve?"

"I reject the charge of treachery as to myself, as I

do the name traitor as applied to Captain Mortimer," replied Dorothy with spirit. "Your insinuation of disloyalty on my part," she added sadly, "is unjust —undeserved. I serve the Queen honestly and loyally. To her I would willingly repeat what I here refuse to say."

"Do not be angry with me!" exclaimed Lord Ashley warmly, drawing nearer to her. "I meant no offense, but I was carried away by my feelings. It distresses me to see you—whose regard would do an emperor honor—place trust in and defend a renegade and traitor—a scoundrel who has been false to his King."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dorothy, shrinking back, "this is terrible! I have told you I do not believe—I do not believe!"

"Listen, then," cried Lord Ashley, pressing still nearer, "and learn now the full truth. He has been captured and is at this minute a prisoner—in close confinement—in the military quarters."

"Then," exclaimed Dorothy with excitement, "he will have an opportunity of speaking for himself, and the truth will stand forth!"

"He has spoken! The truth is out!"

"What do you mean?"

"He has confessed—confessed to his treason!"

"Impossible—oh, impossible!" cried Dorothy distractedly.

"I tell you it is so," continued Lord Ashley vehemently, "and still more will I tell you. As a reward for this confession, which has implicated others and given the Government much valuable information, and also to save the Guards' corps from the shame of having harbored a scoundrel and a traitor, he is not to be made to suffer the penalty of his crimes. I have

permitted an arrangement to be made for his escape, and he has gladly acquiesced."

"You say he has acquiesced to such a thing!" exclaimed Dorothy with an air of bewilderment.

"Yes," retorted Lord Ashley, "and is at this moment on his way to some place of security and oblivion. Now, I beg you to listen to me," he continued with fervor. "I beseech you—I implore you—to put from your mind all further thought of this man, whose name is unworthy of mention in your presence. He has merited death, but has escaped with shame as his portion henceforth. Let us dismiss him from our thoughts. There is another and more honorable matter regarding which I would speak to you. Miss Brandon—Dorothy—I love you!"

"Milord——"

"Yes, I love you," he continued, with the abandon of a man carried away by the force of his feelings, "and I offer you a union which the proudest woman in the realm might find worthy of acceptance. His Majesty, the King, has already signified to me that my appointment as Lord Chancellor is to be followed shortly by my elevation to the Peerage. In fact, I may confide to you that the form of such title has already been selected."

"Milord, I——"

"Nay, hear me to the end," he continued with passionate fervor; "it is more than mere title which I have to offer. As wife of a Lord Chancellor who will know how to extend the influence and power of his high office, you will find yourself in a position of social supremacy which will place you second only to the Queen herself. At a word from you, social careers will be made or marred; at a nod of approval from you, a fashion will spring into life, or be set aside. Men of the world and men of the Court will

respect and fear your power, while women will fawn and flatter for your favor. Rank, title, power, influence—all these I offer you, and, moreover, boundless devotion and immeasurable love. What can I give more?"

He paused and waited. Dorothy sat with bowed head and shifting color and made no sign. Could this, Ashley wondered, be the silence of rejection, or was it merely the hesitation natural to maidenly reserve? Reared throughout his life among soldiers and statesmen possessed of aims and ambitions, himself possessed of a boundless lust for preferment and power, Lord Ashley's tendency was to regard ambition as the all-alluring fetish, the resistless lever, with which to sway human impulse and human action. Furthermore, his actual experiences in his immediate surroundings had tended to impress him with the accuracy of this theory. What he had offered was sufficiently brilliant, as he had said, to be worthy of the acceptance of the proudest woman in the land. Nor had he overstated his case. He was really in a position to give all he tendered. She would surely not refuse! What woman would? At last she spoke.

"I fully realize, Milord, the extent of all you have been good enough to offer me," she said, "and I appreciate the honor you do me. I am glad, too, to learn of the new distinctions which await you and pleased to be the first to congratulate you."

"And you accept?" he cried joyfully, as he bent nearer to her. "You will say—yes?"

"No, no," she exclaimed hastily, as she shrunk back; "I cannot—I cannot—accept."

"You — cannot — accept!" he cried blankly. "And—why?"

She remained silent.

"Why?" he repeated.

Still there was no answer.

"You are not pledged to another?"

"Surely that is something you should not ask."

"But I do ask it," he cried vehemently, springing to his feet, his face pale with anger. "Do you think I am blind—that I cannot surmise! You have been bewitched by that traitor whose crimes I have laid bare before you. In spite of his misdeeds and his shame, you still cling to a mad infatuation, a wild hope, instead of accepting an honorable union. It is the perversity which has marked and marred so many of your sex through the ages. But I am not a man to be thus flaunted and put aside. This silly infatuation, this foolish love of yours can never be realized, for it is given to one who is dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Dorothy, turning pale to the lips. "What do you mean?"

"Ah! I'll tell you!" said Lord Ashley, beside himself with anger. "This man deserved death, but the Government, on the score of policy, was opposed to the notoriety arising from his public trial and execution. It was accordingly decided that he should be afforded opportunities of escape and that he should either be allowed to gain his freedom and hide his perfidy and shame in some obscure corner of the world, or else that the death he so well merited should be dealt out to him while effecting this escape —in other words, a private execution of justice in place of a public one. This question was referred to certain officers of the Government, who in turn left the whole question to me. In the goodness of my heart, I wavered and delayed my decision until the last moment, making the execution dependent upon a certain signal to be given by me. At this very moment the man is escaping. His life depends upon the signal which I shall give."

"But this is murder!" cried Dorothy desperately, springing to her feet.

"It is a judicial execution," said Lord Ashley sternly, "and one that would be approved by every army officer and every loyalist in the country were the facts known."

"I will shout this infamy broadcast," cried Dorothy, wild-eyed and gasping.

"Bah!" exclaimed Lord Ashley with sarcasm, "your utterances will be known merely as the wild ravings of an infatuated woman! What will they weigh against official declarations and the military reports as to the escape and what followed? Such utterances will simply bring notoriety and discredit upon you."

"Have you no mercy?"

"None," he answered inflexibly. "Hear me now for the last time. That instrument against the wall yonder is a sigmagraph. A touch of its electric button causes a flash of light to appear upon the reflector above it, which is transmitted to the receiver upon the roof of the military quarters. In just eight and one-half minutes, sixteen o'clock will sound. If, before the last stroke dies away, three flashes of light are cast from that reflector, mercy will have prevailed and the traitor will be permitted to make good his escape. If no such signal be given he dies."

"This is horrible—horrible!" repeated Dorothy, aghast. "You will surely show mercy and not hold back that signal!"

"Only upon one condition."

"And that is?" cried Dorothy desperately.

"I am but human," said Lord Ashley, speaking rapidly, "and to purchase my happiness I will forego meting out strict justice. In the palace chapel, at this very moment, is the royal chaplain. At a com-

mand from me he can be in this room within two minutes; within two more the words can be spoken which will constitute a binding ceremony. The brilliant public ceremony can come later. Speak but the word. I will summon the chaplain and—this man lives. His fate is in your hands!"

"No, no!" protested Dorothy, "I cannot—cannot!"

"Then he dies!"

Lord Ashley turned aside. He drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, extracted a cigarette and, crossing the room to a side table, lighted it. Walking over to the sigmagraph, he took up his post with his back turned to it.

"Four minutes only are left to you," he said ominously, as he drew out his watch.

His words came to his listener as an electric shock. She roused herself from her momentary lethargy and despair.

"Will you not be moved to justice?" she cried. "Don't you see that what you ask cannot be? I could never know happiness—never make you happy. I should forever have this scene before my eyes—this scene of blood—of treachery!"

"I have told you it is a judicial execution—none the less judicial and proper because justice is meted out privately rather than publicly. High affairs of state under all governments not infrequently demand such a course—a course which in reality shows undeserved mercy to him."

"Mercy! mercy! This you call mercy!"

"It is the only mercy I will show him, unless——"

"Don't say this! You will not permit this wicked, treacherous deed! You will save him! You will

give the signal—say that you will give the signal!"

"Three minutes!"

"No, no! Don't count. You drive me mad! Is there nothing will move you to pity—nothing turn you from this——"

"I've already told you. His fate lies with you!"

"No, no—not that! This cannot—must not be! Anything but that——"

"Then it is you who condemn him by your own act!"

"My own act! I, who would gladly die to save him! But no, it is not my act—not my act! I cannot—I will not do what will bring horror, misery, degradation!"

"You speak of a union with the Chancellor of the Realm as degradation?"

"A union with any man when a woman's whole heart and soul are given to another means misery, degradation. How can you ask it of me—how yourself consent! For I love him—I love him—I love only him!"

"Two minutes!"

"You don't realize—you don't understand! I tell you no, no, this cannot—this must not be. Anything else you ask, but not that! For your own happiness spare me—for your own conscience—your own future peace, save him!"

"Not all the angels in heaven, or devils in hell, shall turn me from my path! You are sacrificing everything to a woman's whim. Time will teach you forgetfulness of this folly and—love!"

"A woman's whim! Ah, the wise Chancellor understands so little of women that he thinks them mere butterflies. But I say to you that when a woman's spirit is once profoundly stirred, she becomes more firm, more implacable, than the sternest man among

you all! Her love knows no measure, no reason, no calculation; her hate has no weakening. Were I to become your wife, I could never forget that the man I adore had been torn from me by force and fraud. My thoughts would always be of him; my only moments of happiness those when I closed my eyes and cheated my senses with the dream that I lay within his arms. The honor, the rank, the titles you offer me, would be nothing, for would they not have been bought at the price of his—of my—happiness! And you—I should hate you!"

"Less than one minute!"

"Less than one minute! And you will permit this crime! You will let him go to his death—my sweetheart—my handsome, gallant sweetheart! No, you will not! You are too noble, too generous!"

"You cannot move me!"

"Do you not see that I shall go mad if you kill him? Say that you will give the signal—that you will give the signal!"

"Your last moment of opportunity is rapidly passing. Will you save him?"

"O God—my God!"

"Hear! the hour strikes!"

"The signal—the signal! Give the signal!"

"Not unless you pledge yourself before the last stroke sounds."

"The signal!"

"Never!"

"A-a-h!"

With a scream she turned suddenly and ran from him to the little table upon which stood the electric lighter. Over her shoulders was a light, loose scarf, which she had worn as part of her garden-party costume. She tore it from her and thrust it into the flame of the electric lighter. In an instant the deli-

cate material had caught the flames and, before Lord Ashley could divine her intention, she rushed to the sigmagraph's indicator and upon its sensitized surface flashed the light thrice; but not before her gown at sleeves and bosom caught in flame.

Lord Ashley, recovering from the first shock of surprise, sprang toward her, dashed the burning scarf to the floor and with a few rapid movements smothered the flames at work upon her frock.

"What have you done?" he cried staring at the injury to her dainty white flesh. "Do you realize that you have placed your life in peril?"

She was dazed and half fainting from the pain of her injuries, and he supported her to a divan at the further end of the apartment.

"Do you realize what you have done?" he repeated.

But despite the pain, despite the fact that she felt her senses were leaving her, the thought of Mortimer's safety was still uppermost in her mind.

"The signal—the signal," she moaned hysterically, "was the signal given in time? Is he safe? Oh, tell me that he is safe! See—see!"

A shriek broke from her. She sat staring straight before her as one seized with a paralysis of fear.

Lord Ashley perceived the look; there was no mistaking its mingled horror and fascinated fear. Abruptly he turned to ascertain its cause.

There within a few feet of him, with pallid features so distorted with rage as to be scarcely human, tall and majestic, the very embodiment of fury, his eyes ablaze with the sullen fires of vengeance, stood Captain Stanley Mortimer. A situation releasing him from his promise—the question of life or death which alone permitted him to cross the

threshold of that room—had arisen. He now stood freed from his pledge.

For a moment the two men faced each other, glaring into each other's eyes. Then the torrent of wrath surging within Mortimer found an outlet in words.

"Scoundrel! Liar!" he hissed between his set teeth.

"What!" cried Lord Ashley, his anger kindling, as fire kindles amid straw. "You dare to apply those epithets to me—the King's Chancellor!"

"It is as man to man that we now speak," retorted Mortimer, struggling with his rage. "Take your sword and defend your life!" He pointed across the apartment and through the open doorway of Lord Ashley's private bureau. Against the wall, amid a panoply of arms, could be seen hanging the sword which the Chancellor had used during the earlier days of the Russian war.

"I refuse to fight you," said Lord Ashley. "I shall summon the guard and have you returned to the confinement from which you have escaped. Before you can claim the right to cross swords as an equal, you must first clear yourself of the stigma of treason which at present defiles you!"

"You refuse!" retorted Mortimer, with a gesture of contempt. "Your refusal will avail you little. I will throttle you to death where you stand. What!" he continued, with biting sarcasm, "can it be possible that the uniform of the Guards has at one time covered the breast of a liar, a traducer and a—*coward!*"

As this final word left Mortimer's lips, Lord Ashley's face in turn became suffused with rage. With all the faults, even crimes into which his ambition had led him in the course of his pyramidal career, one virtue was yet left him, that of physical courage.

With a snarl of rage, he turned sharply and bounded across the room to where his sword hung. Back he ran, drawing the weapon and flinging the scabbard to one side as he advanced on Mortimer, awaiting him with drawn blade and the light of battle in his eyes. Crouched in one corner of the divan, moaning and hysterical, lay Dorothy.

The swords crossed with a clash. Mortimer was widely famed in the service for his skill as a swordsman, but upon this occasion he was fairly matched, and rarely could there have been seen a finer exhibition of swordsmanship. There were lightning feints and thrusts and parries, brilliant grand assaults and equally brilliant defenses upon either side. The black eyes of Ashley glared into the blue eyes of Mortimer, and each pair of eyes flashed forth the murder which was in the hearts behind them. Backward and forward they advanced and retreated, feinting and thrusting, slashing and parrying. At first, the rage which possessed Mortimer had rendered him less cool and wary than was to be desired, and so placed him at a slight disadvantage. Twice Ashley managed to touch lightly and these wounds, slight as they were, served as a vent for Mortimer's overwrought feelings and lent to him, in some degree, the necessary coolness and caution. He could feel the blood trickling down his sleeve, as he skillfully parried a fierce assault. The tingling of the wounds in arm and shoulder came pleasurably to his overwrought spirit. Suddenly he feinted toward the neck. Up flew Ashley's weapon in defense. Then, swift as a shaft of light, Mortimer's sword arm shot out in a straight and deadly thrust. It passed just under Ashley's guard, and the point of Mortimer's sword went home just below the median line. Such was the force and fury of the thrust that Mortimer's

blade ran through to the hilt. With an upward fling of the arms, Ashley crashed backward to the floor, in a heap.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST STAND OF THE GUARDS

A murmur—faint at first—gradually swelling until it merged into a positive cry of alarm! A strange confusion without the gates, which rapidly communicated to the grounds within; the sharp blasts of a bugle; shouts of command; the movements of men; cries, confusion—then a panic among the guests and a promiscuous dash to gain the shelter of the mansion! It all came with the vividness and rapidity of a thunderbolt!

The garden-party at Fairoaks had promised well to be spoken of as a red-letter social event. The guests had been royally amused. The presence of the King and Queen had lent a special luster to the occasion and then, too, there was the beautiful Miss Cameron, affording opportunity alike for observation and for gossip. The entertainment, under the direction of Sir Richard Hollowboy, Imperial and Royal Director of Pyrotechnics and Plastics, had been a huge success. Sir Richard had more than sustained his high reputation; upon this occasion he had fairly eclipsed himself.

Among the features of Sir Richard's entertainment were a series of what Sir Richard was pleased to term, "Fifteen-o'clock Fireworks"—this designation being presumably intended to create the impression of fireworks by daylight. The "daylight fireworks," as a matter of fact, consisted of certain really

wonderful smoke effects in the air, representing extremely interesting and well-executed tableaux.

One of the most colossal reproductions was attracting the interest of the guests when suddenly something of a most startling nature occurred. From all four points of the compass there appeared, as if coming from the sky itself, a number of strange aërial forms, which massed themselves about the gigantic figure in the air and hovered directly above the grounds of the garden-party. Fantastic forms of varying sizes were these strange apparitions—forms which suggested somewhat the outlines of a ship, or boat; but then—who ever saw a ship, or a boat, floating in mid-air? Someone whispered that they formed part of the entertainment; yet there was something too material, too realistic, about them to warrant this belief. And were not those human forms moving about in them?

Outside the gates of Fairoaks, too, strange events were occurring. The two sentries at the gates, stationed there because of the presence of their Majesties, noticed a number of peculiarly constructed mobiles suddenly make their appearance in the highway. These mobiles stopped before the grounds of Fairoaks and the foremost advanced as if to make its way through the gates. There was something suspicious about the general appearance and movements of these mobiles, and one of the sentries promptly challenged.

His answer was a sudden flash of rifle barrels, a point-blank volley and, shot through head and breast, the sentry dropped dead in his tracks. His companion, apparently unwounded, hastily dodged behind the high stone wall and, with a ringing shout, gave the alarm to his fellow-guardsmen, comfortably

encamped upon one of the wide-stretching lawns a short distance away.

In an instant, the guards were up and doing. Through the gateway they swarmed and into the roadway. They were met by rifle fire from the mobiles, which, however, immediately beat a hasty retreat. The guards, several of their number wounded, started in pursuit, led by Captains Farquharson and Bingham. The huge aërial shapes which had been hovering over the grounds, now made movement and rapidly changed their positions until they floated over the highway, immediately above the pursuing guards.

Now followed a scene which was as novel in its form of attack as it was effective and terrible. The air-ships—for it was now plainly to be seen that air-ships they were— began raining down missiles, in the form of exploding bombs, upon the advancing soldiers. Some of these missiles struck the men direct and killed them outright, while others fell upon the hard bed of the highway and exploded, carrying death and destruction in wide circles.

In less than a minute the highway was filled with a long track of dead and wounded men, and still the deadly missiles continued to rain down. Further pursuit of the mobiles was obviously impossible. Farquharson and Bingham halted their men. Several volleys were fired at the air-ships, but this fire was utterly ineffective. They were either bullet-proof or out of range.

Unless the officers would see the extermination of the entire command there in the highway, evidently the only thing to be done was to find shelter immediately for the men—the shelter of the mansion. Besides, in view of this attack, prudence suggested rallying the guards around the person of the King.

The command was accordingly given to retreat, in

extended order, upon the house. This movement was only executed with further loss, as the air-ships continued to follow up and attack. In approaching and passing through the gateway leading into the grounds, the men were necessarily more or less massed, and here the loss was heavy. Captains Farquharson and Bingham stationed themselves at the approaches to this gateway, awaiting the passage of the last man, in order that they themselves might be the last to pass through. It was here that Captain Farquharson fell. His brother officer bent over him, in the endeavor to lend him aid, but one glance was sufficient to show him that all hope here was past. Then, coolly as if on parade, he made his way through the grounds and was the last to enter the house.

His first act was to make provision for defense. He stationed his men upon the broad main stairway and also in position to command the windows at the ground and first stories upon all four sides of the house. To attempt to station any men upon the roof was obviously useless, as they would be destroyed from above by the air-ships, which had been the fate of the men in the highway. His wounded he disposed of as best he could, and the royal party and the guests he gathered together in one group in the big drawing-rooms on the second floor.

His next thought was of those outside who had been wounded, and he organized a small corps of men, under Lieutenant Richmond Dobson, to go out under a flag of truce and bring them in. This corps started out, but returned in a very few minutes empty-handed. Lieutenant Dobson reported that the air-ships had strictly respected the flag of truce, but at the gateway he had been met by a similar signal from the mobiles. The person in command of this party, who wore a peculiarly-shaped gold star upon his left

shoulder, had informed Lieutenant Dobson that he could not be permitted to proceed, but that his wounded would be cared for. The attacking party, he was informed, had ample surgical assistance with them for this purpose. The Lieutenant had then been requested to return to the mansion and bear a message to the officer in command to the effect that unless an unconditional surrender was made within five minutes an attack upon the mansion itself would be begun.

"Oh!" exclaimed Captain Bingham fiercely, "it looks as if they were well-organized and well-prepared, but we are at least under some shelter here. Did you inquire in whose name this command was made?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what was the answer?"

"That it was made in the name of the General commanding the First Army Corps of the New Republic."

"What! A general in command—the First Army Corps!" muttered Captain Bingham. "That sounds like a comprehensive organization. It looks serious!"

At this moment a servant of the house approached with word that His Majesty wished to see Captain Bingham and hear his report.

Captain Bingham accordingly went upstairs and communicated to the King all he had learned.

"Have you audiphoned to the palace for such soldiers as are there?" inquired His Majesty.

"It would be absolutely useless to do so, Sire," replied Captain Bingham. "There is but a comparatively small force there, and should they attempt to come to our relief they would be exterminated to a man before they reached us. Nearly half of my com-

mand was either killed or wounded in traversing the short distance from the roadway to the house. What would it be with any force from the palace attempting to approach over several miles of ground?"

"True," said the King. "Where can assistance, then, be obtained?"

"The nearest point from which effective aid can be sent," replied Captain Bingham, "is from the city, and I have already audiphoned to the army headquarters there. I have explained the attack, and stated that we are besieged and have requested the immediate dispatch of a large force, which has been promised me. I did this, as it seemed to me to be the only thing to do, although I frankly confess that I do not see how even a large force can prevail against an enemy they cannot reach. Possibly, however, they may be able to beat off the air-ships with heavy guns, though I am not sanguine of success."

"But," said the King, "it will be some time before assistance can reach us from the city."

"Allowing for everything," replied Captain Bingham, "about three hours. I have furthermore counseled, as a measure of precaution, that no attempt be made to approach here until after nightfall. With the aid of darkness and a large force, we might at least hope to get you, Sire, and your suite safely away."

"What is it they desire—what is it they ask?" questioned the King.

"I know no more, Sire, than I have already reported to you."

The King reflected a moment.

"Send out to them and inquire," he commanded.

Lieutenant Dobson was sent forth once more, accompanied by a private bearing a flag of truce. He returned in even less time than before. The answer

he bore was that no further information would be furnished; no further delay granted. Unless the King and everyone within the mansion made unconditional surrender within three minutes after the return of the flag of truce, an attack would be begun forthwith.

Captain Bingham reported at once to His Majesty.

"Ah, they appear, then, to know positively that We are here!" said the King.

"Evidently, Sire," replied Captain Bingham.

"What remains, then to be done?"

"Nothing, Sire," answered Captain Bingham, with grim determination, "except for the Guards to defend this house and those within it while one stone stands upon another and while there is one man left upon his feet!"

As he spoke there was a sound of rending, of tearing and of disrupted masonry on the eastern side of the mansion.

"The attack has begun, Sire!" said Captain Bingham. "I would ask your permission to return to my men." And with a bow as courtly and as deferential as if he were standing in the great ball room of the palace, Captain Richard Bingham backed from the royal presence and returned to his men.

As soon as he reached his post at the head of the main stairway, Captain Bingham quickly perceived that the attack had been renewed by the air-ships and that it was directed by hurling explosives against the eastern wall of the building. So powerful were these explosives that a great gaping aperture soon appeared, stretching from window to window, wide and deep enough to have admitted a motor of the largest type. The attack was then shifted to the front of the house and the front wall blown open in a similar

manner. Then, with a crash, the whole of the great front door was blown in.

The soldiers on the ground floor and upon the main stairway were now exposed to a raking fire from two sides and the air-ships were not slow to follow up their advantage. They hurled their explosive missiles into the men massed upon the stairway and with rifle fire picked off individual soldiers at windows and upon the lower floor. The soldiers returned the fire with spirit, sending volley after volley at the air-ships as they appeared through the great, yawning gaps in the walls. This fire seemed, however, utterly ineffectual against the strong sides of the air-ships and the protecting shields thrown up around them. Comrades were falling fast on every side; the air was filled with the groans and the cries of the wounded and the dying; the men were growing disheartened. Then the voice of Captain Bingham rang out above the tumult:

"Guards, stand fast and die like men!"

A hoarse cheer, despairing yet valiant—the final testimony to the native valor of the American soldier—came from the men in response to their leader's words. Yes, they would die like men! And carbines were replenished with fresh determination, and fresh volleys were poured in upon the enemy.

But it was all of no avail. Their efforts, directed against an enemy they could not reach, were futile. Down went Lieutenant Dobson, the last of the subalterns yet unscathed, and still the missiles continued to rain upon the devoted and rapidly diminishing band.

The terrible devastation going on was not unknown to those gathered in the shelter of the drawing-rooms, and the same servant who had come to him before, now crept forth to Captain Bingham's side. In

his hand he carried a large pocket-handkerchief of white silk, attached to the end of a stick. This he extended to Captain Bingham.

"His Majesty directs you to surrender," he stammered, his teeth chattering with the horror of the sights about him.

Captain Bingham turned upon him with the blazing eyes of a madman. "You lie, you scoundrel!" he shouted. "You have misunderstood His Majesty's orders!" And with the flat of his sword he struck the emblem of surrender from the man's hand, and with the point of his sword at the man's throat he drove him back to the shelter of the drawing-rooms.

And now the stairway, broken and demolished in many places, was slippery with blood and choked with the bodies of the fallen. The rain of missiles had ceased and had been succeeded by a sharp rifle fire which rapidly picked off the few remaining survivors. Down went the color sergeant at Captain Bingham's side. The Captain stood at the head of the stairway, still guarding the approach to the drawing-rooms. He had been struck on the left side of the head by a flying fragment of some kind, and from the wound the blood trickled down his pale face and over his uniform. He was the last man left.

The rifle fire from the air-ships closed entirely, and through the demolished front there surged a mass of men—men from the mobiles. They were armed with rifles and upon their left shoulders they bore a white star. A golden star of peculiar formation glittered upon the shoulder of their leader, and he carried a sword.

"Surrender!" shouted this leader, advancing up the stairway, sword in hand, followed by his men.

Captain Bingham, standing grim and bloody at the head of the stairs, made no reply.

"Surrender!" repeated the leader. "Do you not see that your men are all dead and that you are ours?"

"Curse you," came the reply from the guardsman, "as they went, so will I go. You shall never pass while I live." And with upraised sword he stood blocking the way to the drawing-rooms.

The leader now crossed swords with Captain Bingham, while two of his men sought to creep by to right and left and either attack, or capture, the Captain from the side. But the officers of the guards were all brilliant swordsmen, and Captain Bingham in that last desperate stand fully vindicated the honor and the reputation of the famous Guards' corps. Besides, being at the extreme top of the stairway, he held an advantage which served to offset the odds against him. First he wounded the man to the right and an instant later cut down the man on the left. Then, with a quick half-arm cut which laid his opponent's face open from forehead to chin, he sent the leader reeling backward down the stairs.

When his men saw their leader fall, a howl of dismay and rage went up. There was a quick flash of leveled rifles and a volley. Captain Bingham rose to his full height and for one brief instant his form stood erect and rigid. He raised his sword high aloft and his voice broke into a great hoarse cry—the last salute of the last of the Guards to the cause he served:

"Long live the King!"

Then his sword-arm dropped, the weapon fell clattering from his hand and, with a headlong plunge, he crashed down the stairs over the dead bodies of his men.

And prone upon the battle-swept stairway lay the regimental standard, with its proud motto: "We die but surrender not!" True to its standard, its motto and its traditions, the Imperial Guard had perished to a man.

With a shout, the victors charged up the now undefended stairs, forced the drawing-room doors and, an instant later, all inside the house were prisoners in their hands.

"Water!" gasped a dying guardsman, with glassy, upturned eyes.

A slight, graceful figure, clad in short hunting costume, the head covered with a jaunty little hat ornamented with a pert red feather, bent rapidly over the wounded man. Close beside her hovered a big, broad shouldered young fellow.

"Come away, Valerie!" he cried. "This is no place for you." But the girl paid no heed to this admonition.

"Keep still, Jack. Where is your Captain?" she asked eagerly of the soldier. "Was Captain Mortimer with you in this fight?"

"Water! Water!" gasped the wounded man.

"I am getting it for you," she answered, as her fingers worked nervously at the water-bottle strapped at her side. "Answer me—was Captain Mortimer with you?"

"No," painfully replied the guardsman; "he—was—not."

She thrust the water-bottle between his eager fingers and rose quietly.

At that instant a soldier of the King, lying severely wounded at the head of the stairway, roused himself from his lethargy and noted the onward rush of the enemy. With the desperate determination to strike one last blow in the cause he served, he raised

himself upon his elbow and fired wildly down the stairway. Valerie gave a little cry and staggered backward, her left arm falling limp and helpless at her side. Jack caught her in his arms.

"My God! They have killed you, Valerie," he gasped, all the ruddy color dying out of his face.

"I—feel—very—faint," she sobbed, lying heavy in his arms.

"Help!" shouted Jack, a great fear and despair tugging at his heart.

A man came hurrying toward them. He was one of the surgeons attached to the invading corps.

"Lay her upon the ground," he said to the anxious Jack, as he bent over her and proceeded to examine the injury. "Ah!" he continued, "fortunately only a wound in the arm, but—she has fainted."

A small group had by this time surrounded the surgeon and his patient, among them a swarthy-faced man who displayed every evidence of poignant anxiety. An officer evidently in high command hurried upon the scene.

"How came this girl here, Captain Robert?" asked the officer.

"She was very headstrong, sir, and there was no holding her back," replied the swarthy-faced and anxious one.

"Let her be taken at once to the hospital," ordered the officer, "and as she is so headstrong detach a guard to take her and keep her there."

"Do you think I can safely detail you to this duty?" asked Captain Robert of Jack.

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the still pale and trembling Jack.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW ERA

"The King! The Guards! They have been attacked!" cried Kearns as, breathless and panting, he ran into the Chancellerie.

"Attacked!" repeated Mortimer, standing sword in hand, stern-faced and bleeding from a wound in the arm. "Attacked by whom?"

"The air-ships—the air-ships!" gasped Kearns. "But," he exclaimed, pointing to the form upon the ground; "what—what is this?"

"One who has met a rightful doom!" answered Mortimer. "But the attack—tell me of the attack."

"I was on my way to the King," said Kearns, in rapid tones, "and was approaching Fairoaks when I perceived the air-ships and ordered the phaeromobile halted. I watched and saw it all."

"Saw all what?"

"They had driven the King—the guests—the Guards—all of them into the mansion," continued Kearns, with the same rapid enunciation, "and the air-ships attacked them there. My God! they blew great holes into the side and front of the house, and through these holes they made attack upon the Guards. Then I saw the men in the motors come up and charge into the mansion and I knew that all was over. Then, back I came here to you at full speed, but as I reached the palace I looked behind and saw that I was being pursued both on land and

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from above. I tell you they are hot upon us—in a few minutes they will be here!"

The portieres parted as he spoke and Beatrice ran, eager and excited, into the room.

"We are attacked! A swarm of men are pouring into the palace and the grounds. Where is Dorothy? Oh!—oh!—what is this!" and she ran to the figure lying upon the divan.

"I must go to my post," cried Mortimer, casting a desperate glance toward the divan. "I must rally the men to the defense of the palace!"

"Too late!" exclaimed Kearns, turning sharply.

As he spoke, there were sounds without and through the portieres and the main door of the Chancellerie a number of armed men, with stars at their shoulders, swarmed in, an officer at their head.

"Surrender!" cried the officer, as his eyes fell upon Mortimer's uniform.

"Surrender!" repeated Mortimer, with rage. "How dare you utter that word in the King's palace to an officer of the King's Guard? Back, you horde of rebels, I say, or I will cut a path through you!"

From behind him there came an exclamation of fear, a plaintive appeal to him to stop, but he heard it not and, with upraised sword, he advanced upon the men barring his passage. The officer raised his sword in an attitude of defense and a dozen rifles instantly flashed into position.

"Halt! Do not fire!" came suddenly the sharp command from the rear and a tall and commanding figure forced its way through the ranks. An instant later, Mortimer found himself confronted by General Mainwarren.

"Do not fire!" repeated General Mainwarren to his men. "I place this officer and all these here under my special protection."

"But I cannot—I will not—avail myself of your protection!" cried Mortimer, still standing with upraised sword. "I will force my way through to my men, or fall in the attempt!"

"There will be no necessity for that," said General Mainwarren, gently. "Your passage shall not be barred and you shall be free to go where you will. But," he added, calmly, "it will be useless to seek your soldiers, for they are all dead."

"Dead!" repeated Mortimer aghast.

From the grounds without came a great cry:

"Long live the New Republic!"

Before General Mainwarren could make answer to Mortimer's exclamation, a file of men, with an officer in command, invaded the room.

"A wounded guardsman, sir, and his companion," reported the officer, saluting General Mainwarren. "What shall be done with them?" and he brought forward Captain Swords and Professor Dean.

"Oh, cousin, cousin!" cried Beatrice, running up to General Mainwarren, all excitement, "I demand protection—special protection for him!" and she pointed to Captain Swords.

"It is granted!" said General Mainwarren, with a smile. "His companion, likewise, shall be protected. We all of us owe something," he added, turning to his men, "to Professor Dean and to Captain Mortimer."

"Long live the New Republic!" again came the cry from the grounds.

"How so? What do you owe us?" exclaimed Mortimer in astonishment.

"To Professor Dean," said General Mainwarren, gravely, "we owe the primary invention of the airship from which we derive our strength; and to Captain Mortimer, because to his unexpected escape from

us, the New Republic owes its birth three days earlier than was anticipated. Yes, Captain Mortimer, your escape precipitated our attack just three days."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mortimer, blankly.

"I think you are needed over there," said Beatrice, touching him lightly upon the arm, and turning her eyes toward the divan. "As for me, I must give my attention to the wounded. How sweet and cute he looks with the bandage tilted down toward his left eye!" And she walked to where stood Captain Swords and rested both hands upon his arm.

Mortimer crossed to the divan where Dorothy lay. He bent over her until their lips nearly met and whispered so low that none other heard — something which brought the color in a warm tide to her pale face.

"Yes," continued General Mainwarren, with fervor, "we owe, as I have said, something to both of these men. To-day the New Republic has birth—a New Republic which shall give men that equality which can never be found under a monarchy and which shall be untainted, please God, from the hideous evils which fastened themselves upon the Old Republic of our forefathers — a New Republic which shall free its citizens from the bondage of industrial slavery and shall set to the world at large an example of higher economic conditions and a higher standard of human happiness. Let us joyously greet, then, this glorious event!"

"Three cheers for the New Republic!" rang forth from the men gathered about their General.

From the grounds without came the answering cry:

"Long live the New Republic! Long live the New Republic!"

THE END

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