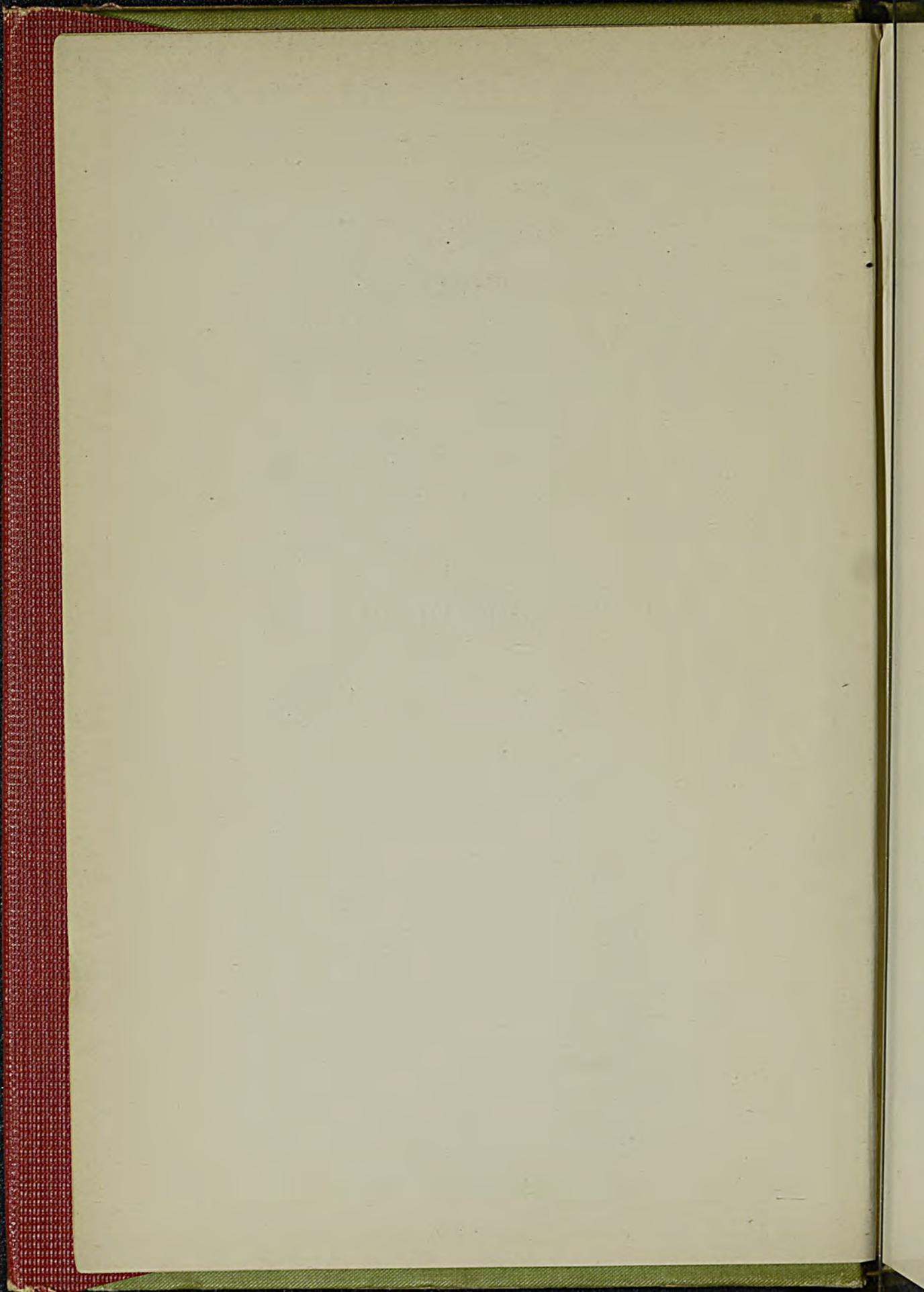
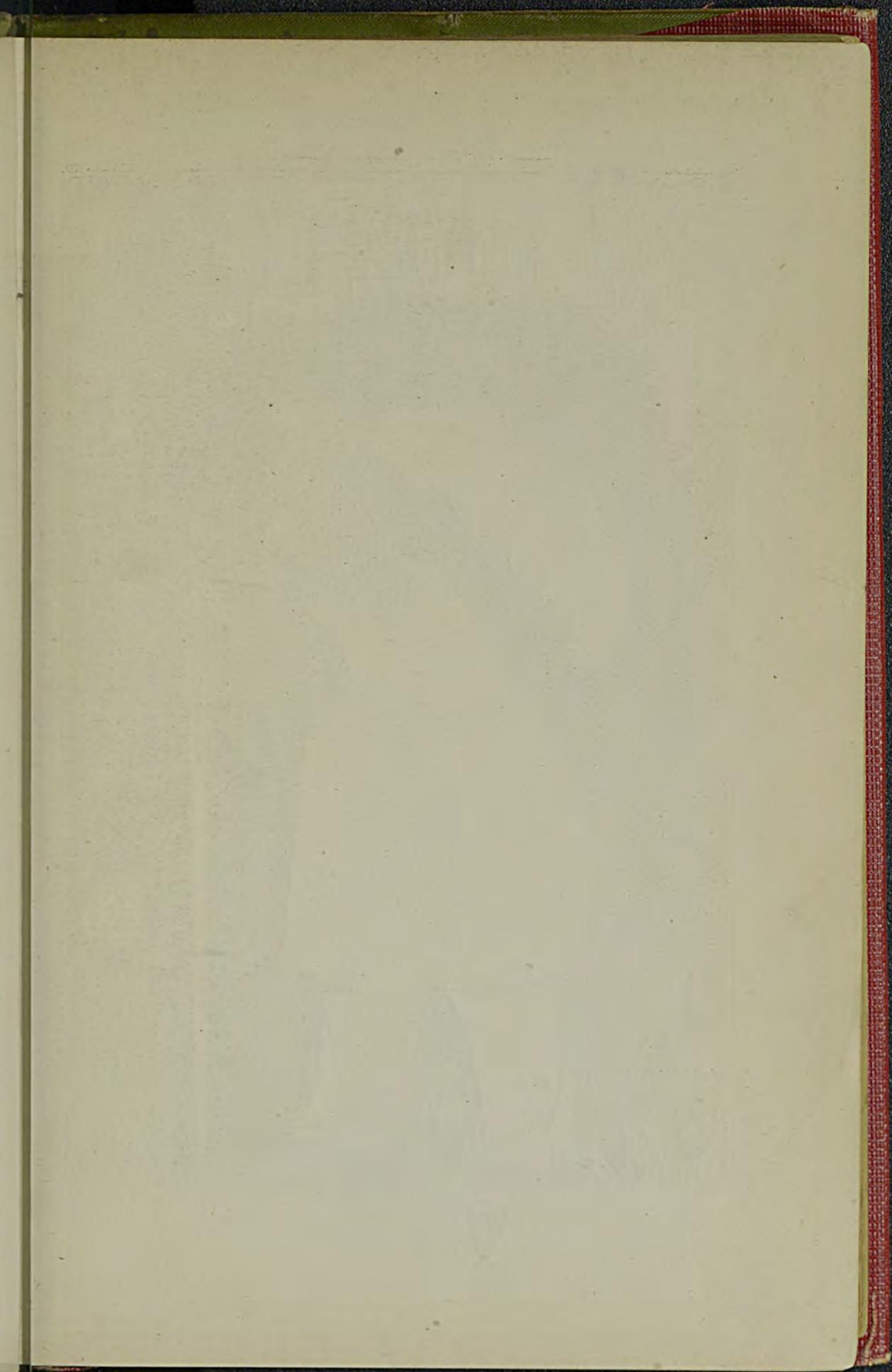


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BARON VERDIGRIS







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BARON VERDIGRIS. A
ROMANCE OF THE RE-
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JOCELYN QUILP. WITH A
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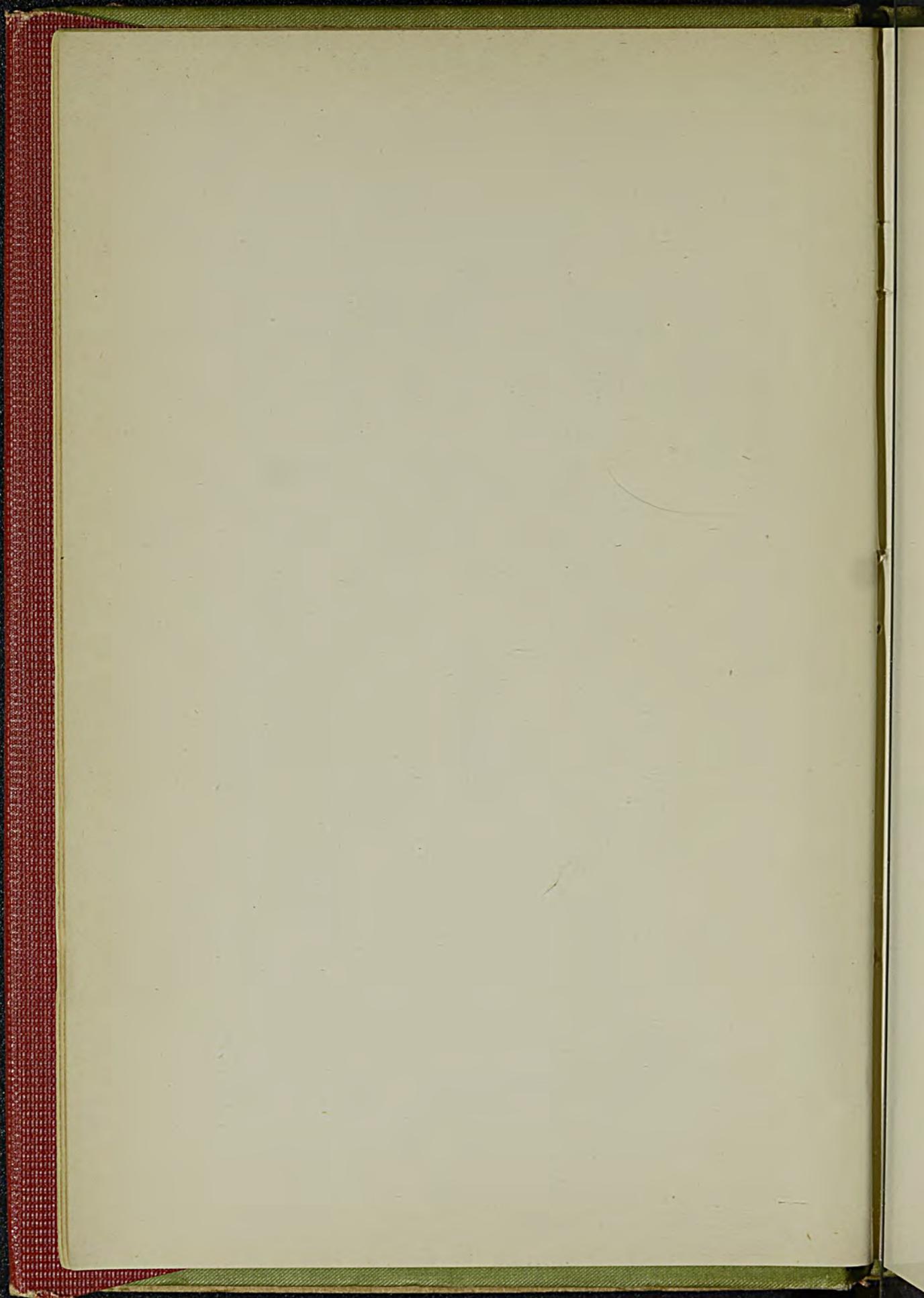
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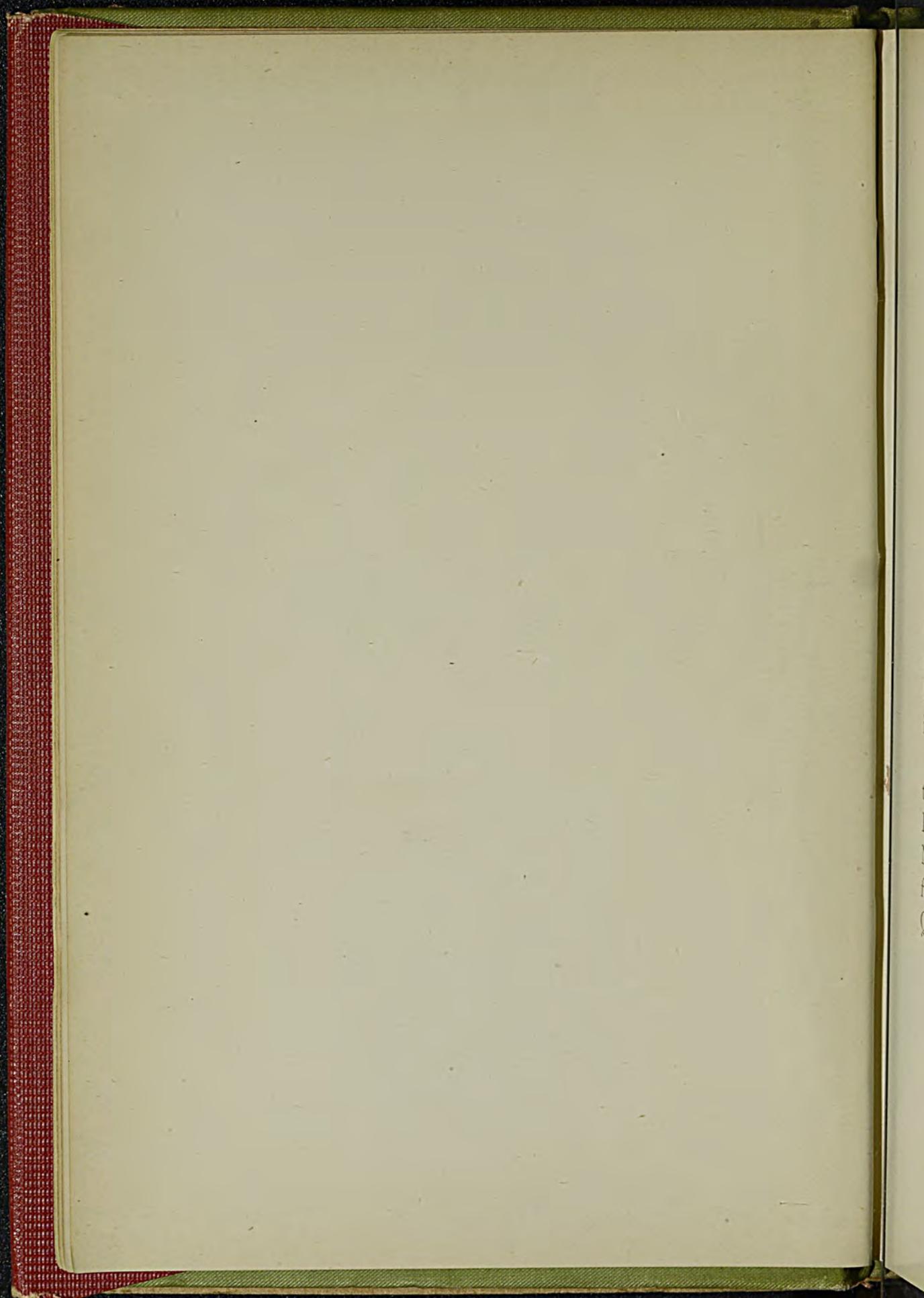
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*This Book is Dedicated equally to Fin-de-Siècle-ism,
the Sensational Novel, and the Conventional
Drawing-Room Ballad*



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PROLOGUE.

IT was a Mathematician that was the cause of it all. When I add that he was also a Monk, the absolutely irresponsible wickedness of the man as a Whole, as an Entity of Combined Parts, will not be doubted by the most innocent and unsuspecting mind.

Somewhere about the year 1000 A.D. there lived in the ancient City of Eboracum a learned monk, by name Nalyticus, who divided his day into four equal parts, called by himself Quaternions. Whether the name had a

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jesting reference to a recent development of the Mathematik Science, or whether it was simply chosen at random, we cannot at this distance of time determine; for I would go further than the Monk, who asserted that progression was as easy as retrogression, and I would urge that in many cases it is infinitely easier to prophesy than to retrace the steps of past events and to arrive at an accurate conception of the course taken by these events.

But this is not an Ordinary Book—I think it only fair to state this frankly at the beginning—and I find that almost in the first page I am slipping into the most conspicuous characteristic of the Ordinary Book, and am writing about My Conceptions, My Views, My Deductions, instead of proceeding at once with my story. I will endeavour not to

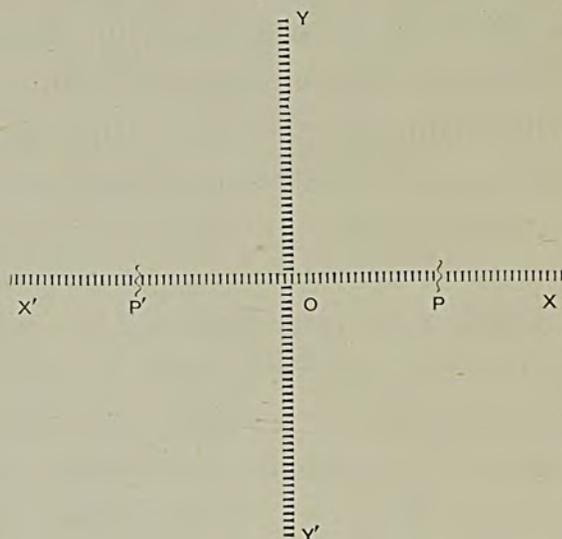
Baron Verdigris

be guilty again of this lowest possible form of vice ; for it is pardonable that one should talk of people other than oneself, because one does not know them, but to waste a moment upon one's own individuality, a thing that one has known intimately all one's life, is to be wantonly foolish and gratuitously vile.

To return. As I have said, Nalyticus divided his day into four Quaternions, consisting each of six hours. These he devoted respectively to Sleeping, Eating and Drinking, Visiting the Rich (and Poor), and to the Study of Mathematics. If he had given up his time exclusively to the first two occupations, there would have been no great harm done : he might even have indulged in the third amusement comparatively innocuously, if it had not been for the Mathematics.

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For one day, as he was poring over the geometrical distinction between + and -, it occurred to him in a flash of



inspiration that this distinction might have an important application to the affairs of human life.

“I take,” said he, “an origin O , and two straight lines xOx' , yOy' , at right

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angles to each other and passing through O . Now suppose I take a point moving along Ox , and measure its distance from O ; let this distance be a . It is clear that there are two points on the line xOx' which are at a distance a from O ; and I distinguish these points by agreeing to consider lengths measured from O towards the *right hand*, that is outwards from O along Ox , *positive*, and lengths measured from O towards the *left hand*, *negative*. By this means I at once settle the positions of two points P, P' whose distances from O are each equal to a , by calling P 's distance $+a$, and the distance of P' , $-a$. The same applies to lengths along yOy' , those measured upwards from O being $+$ and downwards from O , $-$.

“So far, so good. But it is my conviction that for every geometrical

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interpretation there is also a Specific Human interpretation, and my aim is to find it in the present case."

Nalyticus pondered long upon this problem—so long that the sands of his hour-glass chronicled the passing of five hours and thirty minutes of the day's Quaternion. Even when drunk this philosopher was exactly and rigidly punctual. Nowadays a man must be *exalté* to consider it worth while to attend to such a trifle as punctuality, but you must remember that the days of which I am writing were more simple and barbarous than our own.

"But thirty minutes left to me," he mused distractedly, "and I am resolved to find the solution this day."

Then the brilliant idea which has been hinted at in a former page struck Nalyticus with great violence.

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“I have found it,” he cried triumphantly.

“The application is almost childishly evident,” he resumed rapidly. “The negative and the positive in Human Life are the respective directions of Memory and of Prophecy, or Pre-Vision. The origin is clearly the *status quo* of an individual man at any moment which is the *Present*—that is, a man is always in a state of To-Be or To-Have-Been Great or Little ; but at the Moment of Being he is accurately a zero point, and so may be suitably chosen for the origin.”

From the tenor of the last remarks it may be thought by some that Nalyticus was a Cynic. This was emphatically not the case ; for a certain amount of humour is essential to the quality of Cynicism, however small in quantity or

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of however mean a standard that humour may be. And Nalyticus was merely a Philosopher.

“Now,” he went on, in pursuance of his chain of analogy, “the meaning of all this is that it is equally easy to Pre-visionize and to Retro-visionize, or Remember. I am truly grieved that this scientific fact throws so questionable a light upon the Prophets of my Church, but that cannot be helped. I will no longer keep a secret which they should have been the first to tell the world. For now, since I have discovered that the difference between knowing the future and knowing the past is simply one of Direction Along the Same Straight Line, I have absolute faith that the method of reversing this Direction will presently become clear to me, and I shall then not hesitate to make public what has hitherto

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been only used as a method to obtain a false reputation for inspiration.”

And with the falling of the last nine grains of sand in the hour-glass at his elbow, Nalyticus solemnly uttered these words, which formed the key-note of many future evils:—

“We can proceed in *two* directions from the origin.”

When this philosopher asserted that he had faith in the consummation of an event, he was never in error; for he shared the virtue which is common to his class, the virtue of never betting upon anything short of a certainty. So that his vehemence on the present occasion indicated the probability of his having already discovered the method of reversing any force, physical or mental. Be this as it may, it is certain that at an early period of the next day's Mathe-

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matical Quaternion, the whole method, practical and theoretical, was quite clear to him.

What the method was, we cannot, unfortunately, know. I say unfortunately, but probably those who read the remarkable story which is to follow, will agree that the loss, far from being regrettable, is in reality a blessing in disguise. All we can ascertain at this date is the fact that Nalyticus discovered an exceedingly simple means by which any human being, starting from his Present as an origin, could with equal ease move either positively in the direction of the Future or negatively in the direction of the Past.

He at once made known his discovery to all with whom he came in contact, and from them it spread, with a rapidity that cannot fail to astonish us when we

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consider the slowness of communication that existed in the eleventh century—it spread, I say, to all parts of the civilized world.

The result was speedily and painfully apparent ; for there were not wanting large numbers of people who turned this discovery of Nalyticus into a means for securing their own personal and selfish ends. These abandoned wretches, utilizing the Idea of the Zero Present to obtain a knowledge of the future, grasped all the advantages accruing from the comforts and elegancies of scientific and artistic development (for when Nalyticus had fully worked out his scheme, it proved that the act of travelling in the positive direction not only gave the power of Prophecy, as such, but also the power to actually enjoy benefits which were intended only for future ages) ; they util-

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ized the Idea with this end in view, and then, refusing to believe that anything but the Present existed, abandoned themselves to the most carnal and temporal enjoyments.

Perhaps the most distressing consequences of Nalyticus' ill-judged activity are to be seen in the Histories and the Works of Fiction of the Nineteenth Century. For, on the one hand, it is source of bitter complaint that many of our Histories are little short of Romances—well-written, vigorous, and very readable, but still Romances—and that a large number of our *soi-disant* Romances are so far pure History as to bear strong internal evidence of being nothing more than transcripts from past Works.

My aim in the present book has been largely to give an explanation of the causes to which this Inaccuracy and

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this Plagiarism are due. The Story of Baron Verdigris will in itself afford an instructive object-lesson ; and I propose to devote a small part of this Introductory Chapter to the indication of the prejudicial effect which persons who were less desperately wicked, and therefore less delicately refined, than the Baron, have had upon the reputations of some modern Writers.

It will be easily seen that, since this Method of Reversed Direction was easy of application by any the meanest of men, a great weapon of offence was placed in the hands of those who have existed in all ages, the people whose whole being revolts against the very name of Literature, and who know of no greater pleasure than that of upholding this great Art to popular ridicule and contumely. Naturally, then, when such

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men as these moved in the positive direction as far as the end of the Nineteenth Century (for, curiously enough, it is only the negative direction of memory that has a finite limit), and when they read its Histories and its Works of Fiction, they made haste, with a devilish ingenuity and delight, in the first place to controvert the facts stated in the Histories by causing the events to happen differently, and secondly to write Poems and Novels which contained the same central idea, and in many cases almost the exact phraseology of the "posterital" works.

I am tempted at this stage to dwell upon a curious light which is thrown on the workings of Fate by the success that attended the endeavours of these wretches; for it would seem that a future book is predestined in the

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strictest sense of the term, that is, it cannot but be written in one fixed manner, while actions and the affairs of practical life appear to be governable by the will of the individual.

But I cannot stay to discuss a point of this ethical nature, for I fear that, if I make this Introduction much longer, my readers will pass it over altogether and begin with Baron Verdigris himself. This I should be sorry to see occur, firstly, because I fear that the story would be somewhat unintelligible and confusing, unprefaced by a few explanatory remarks; and secondly, because my great object in this book, as in life, is to be Very Moral, and I cannot bear to think of my fellow-beings losing so much morality as I have contrived to cram into these opening pages.

So I will allow myself but few more

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words, and those few are uttered solely in the interests of baronial and personal explanation.

First, as to Baron Verdigris. Let it not be thought that he had anything in common with the unprincipled Philistines mentioned immediately above. As I have said, he was Supremely Wicked, and therefore essentially a gentleman; and I have endeavoured so to chronicle his adventures in the ensuing pages as to hold up to universal admiration the delicacy which prompted him at all times to be solicitous for the reputations of Posterity, whether Poets, Painters, or Professional Criminals. As to the inconsistencies implied by his use of some modern luxuries and creature-comforts, his conduct is entirely defensible upon two separate lines: the one, that the novelty of his sensations was apt oc-

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asionally to confuse his perceptions of *Was* and *To Be*, and the other, that he considered these little additional luxuries to be necessary in the highest interests of his Art.

Finally, as to my reason for telling the story in the fashion of the Sensational Work of Fiction. To save unnecessary verbiage, I will put down this reason somewhat in the form of a syllogism.

I am a Democrat and believe in the Divinity of the Opinion of the Greatest Number.

I have examined the records of the sales of various classes of books, and find that popular opinion is in favour, immeasurably in favour, of the ultra-sensational in literature.

Ergo, I write in accordance with the divine sentiment expressed by the greatest number.

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In view of the evils attendant upon the scheme for which Nalyticus was responsible, it may be some satisfaction to my contemporaries to know that this Philosopher died a lingering and extremely painful death.

CHAPTER I.

HIGH up in a chamber of his lonely castle sat the Baron Verdigris.

The light of the electric lamp, exquisitely modulated by the delicate pink shade, fell full upon his swarthy face and upon the inky blackness of his large moustache; and the lines about his brows told that he was engaged in an unusual occupation—that he was thinking, in short.

From time to time he lifted a tumbler from the table at his side, and the light shining through it shewed, to the eye of a *connoisseur*, that it contained the richest Australian Burgundy.

“ This is the end of the eleventh cen-

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ture," he mused, "which is awkward. I should infinitely have preferred to shoot her—a revolver is such a pretty, such an exquisitely refined weapon."

He raised the glass, with a quick upward movement of his strong right hand, exclaiming passionately,—

"Oh, why am I not posterity? It is so dull to be an ancestor!"

Then at one gulp he drained the ruddy beaker, and continued in the same soliloquizing vein:—

"I am bold and bad—whose fault is that? My parents', without a question! I am ravishingly handsome—who is responsible for that? Myself, again beyond all doubt!"

The Baron appeared to be pleased with his train of thought, for a smile of remarkable beauty lit up the gloom which was usually so characteristic of his features.

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Presently, however, his face became once more stern and determined.

“This is childish,” he exclaimed—his words came sharply and incisively, like the click of a rat-trap when it descends upon its luckless victim. “I am dwelling upon mere truisms. I am bad, but I must not rest content until I am worse. The Lady Meningitis must be killed—that is clear. The poets have written such beautiful verses upon her death that, for their very reputations, I must compass it.”

He broke off here to open a fresh bottle of the ruby wine.

“By bluff King Hal,” he cried angrily, “this man of mine hath mislaid the corkscrew!”

The Baron was indeed furious, for few things irritated him more than the paltry inattentions of his servants. He

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hastily took down a piece of glittering armour from the wall, and, going to the head of the staircase, dashed it down the abyss that yawned within its spiral climb.

“I’ faith,” he muttered, “it may perchance crack the varlet’s skull. At least it will awaken him.”

Full speedily there was a noise of ascending footsteps and a deferential tap at the door of the Baron’s room.

“By the potential shade of the unborn Lion-Heart,” cried the Baron testily, “where hast thou laid the corkscrew?”

The man quivered beneath the anger of his master, and answered quaveringly:

“My liege, a cork—a cork—I have not heard of the thing my liege hath been pleased to name.”

The Baron smiled that rare smile of his and, with the easy grace that bespoke

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his noble descent, dug his servitor hard in the ribs. He could unbend, this haughty Baron, when the occasion warranted; and he had but just remembered that the corkscrew came later.

“Nay, fear not,” he said in a kindly voice, “I did but jest. I said to thee in Latin that I would gladly sup. Lay venison and a mead-full tankard in the dining-hall.”

His servants knew in some measure how to humour their lord and, since just now the Baron was pleased to indulge in quips, the servitor laughed full heartily. So great was his mirth, indeed, that he rolled upon the floor and so departed through the door and down the echoing staircase, still rolling.

When he had gone, the Baron impatiently broke the neck of the bottle upon the shining fender-rail of brass,

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poured out another tumbler and resumed his meditations.

“The poets poisoned her, which is a pity. I doubt whether one gets any enjoyment—in the highest sense of the term—from a murder, unless there be any amount of blood. However, the Inevitable is Unescapable, as I think Carlyle observes, and poison it shall be. Now Catherine d’ Medici—her methods were not altogether in bad taste.”

But a look of doubt came over his features.

“I cannot remember,” he murmured, “whether she comes in my time or not.”

Saying this, he strode quickly over to a shelf of books. He took down a book of dates, handsomely bound in red, and looked through the pages.

“As I feared!” he sighed, “she is

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one of posterity. I must find some other way."

Then he resumed his lounge-chair, and pondered deeply. Presently a lighter humour came upon him and he sang in his rich, bass voice the fragment of a song which had occurred to him :

The poison of poets is a very nice thing,
If blood were not more to one's taste ;
Ah! there is the woe that Time bears in his sting,
We can murder but seldom while Youth's on
the wing,
And a murder with poison's extravagant waste.

The Baron Verdigris had a singularly striking personality.

It was so varied—that was the charm of it. In his lighter moments he could write verse and sing his own airs to these songs—could make love, and jest with his servants ; while in his serious moods he could murder with the best.

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The seriousness soon returned to-night, however, for the case was urgent. At last the method became clear to him.

“Of course, of course!” he exclaimed. “The use of powdered glass began long before Catherine’s time—before my own time, I feel certain.”

To make quite sure upon the point, he again went to the shelf of books, and this time he took down a larger tome than before. He sought diligently for some mention of powdered glass, but the only fact that he could discover was that this method was used by the early Italian poisoners.

He shut up the book and replaced it. His next words were significant.

“It shall be powdered glass,” he said, almost fiercely.

There was something in the tone of his voice as he uttered these words that

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was curious, unintelligible. In fact, it was just one of those shades of expression that are capable of lending an entirely new character to the whole of a man's future utterances. Do I make myself clear? I trust not, because this is a tale of mystery that I am telling, and I spoil all if I let the reader approach the solution too nearly before the end of the book—whether he is to approach it even then will depend entirely upon how clearly I see my way to explanations.

However, I may hint at the doubt which was suggested by the Baron's last words. Was he quite sincere? Did he honestly believe that the use of powdered glass began before, instead of after, his own time? In other words, was he in earnest about compassing the death of the Lady Meningitis? Perhaps we shall see.

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His next words were, in appearance at least, innocent enough.

“But first,” he said, “I will sup right royally. Let me hie me to the venison and the festive mead.”

The next evening there were strange noises in the wainscot of the Baron Verdigris’ castle.

Was it mice?

No, it was ghosts.

And these ghosts were telling one another that the Lady Meningitis lay dead upon her couch.

* * * * *

The Baron stood once more within his chamber. His face was pale and the muscles stood out upon it like a ship’s cable.

“I forget,” he was saying. “My memory grows weaker—yet I am sure that there is a Scotland Yard in my

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own time. Yes, it is so!—And they will be upon me! I must fly!”

Baron Verdigris was extraordinarily perturbed to-night—so perturbed as to suggest that there was something beyond the mere murder to trouble him. For a murder was to him, at ordinary times, simply a deep and pleasurable emotional effect; remorse was only possible if he bungled in the execution of the deed—and the Baron never bungled.

But, in spite of this strange perturbation, he managed by the exertion of his vast will-power to concentrate his mind upon the means of escape, weighing carefully all the facts at his command.

“I must get out of the country,” he exclaimed between his set teeth; “but how? Were steamboats invented last century or next year? Again I forget, strangely forget! I think next year,

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however, so that it must be by a sailing vessel. Oh! it is a bitter thing, this life! The steamboat would have done the distance in so much shorter a time, and I should have been spared much sea-sickness. But away with regrets! I have too little time for luxuries. Trains—what about trains? No, they are not invented either. I must ride my restive steed. Would that the journey to Southampton were not so long!”

He proceeded to place a few things in the Gladstone bag which lay upon a chair in the room, and soon the courtyard echoed to the sound of his departing horse's hoofs.

In still less time the courtyard re-echoed to the sound of his returning horse's hoofs.

The bit and bridle were already covered

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thick with blood and foam, and the Baron's face witnessed to the wrath which was consuming him.

"Such folly is undreamed of!" he cried, "I have neglected the most elementary precaution. I forgot to lie to my henchman."

He leaped from his horse, not without a dim feeling that he was in danger of being prosecuted for leaving the train while it was still in motion, and rapidly ascended the stairs. By the time he reached his own room, he was too breathless to be angry, even if the necessity for dissimulation had not been so great.

He summoned his servant, the faithful henchman whom we last saw rolling down the stairs in a paroxysm of mirth. He now entered sedately enough. The Baron laid his finger upon his lip im-

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pressively, almost mysteriously, and motioned to the man to close the door.

Then the Baron assumed an air of playful ease.

“Grammercy, Sirrah!” he exclaimed lightly, “to-night I ride northward, even to the Land of Scots, to shoot——”

The Baron was again forgetting himself, but he stopped in time, and then finished his sentence naturally enough :

“‘To shoot the Pict with bow and arrow,
Pierce his brain and cleave his marrow,’

as the old song says.”

Of course the Baron was once more borrowing from his knowledge of modern usage, and composing his old song on the spur of the moment. That was part of his versatility.

“Yes, sir,” answered the man.

“Eh?” said the Baron sharply.

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"I mean—may I bear my liege company, and tend him through the fight?"

"No!" responded the Baron sharply. He was hurt. He had thought that not one of his servants had any knowledge of the positive direction.

"If any one should tarry here and ask of me," he went on more calmly, "say that I shall return within the year, and bid them wait."

Then he left the room. After he had gone, the henchman took possession of the lounge-chair and lit a cigar (which was odd if his innocence was so great as his master had supposed). Presently he muttered:

"I know what I know."

This was doubtless a perfectly correct statement of fact: in spite of which, it may yet have interest for the reader—or, on the other hand, it may

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not: it altogether depends upon what happens later in the book.

Meanwhile the Baron was once more galloping out of the courtyard.

One thing alone troubled him as he urged on his foaming stallion. A vague fear of some unthought-of danger lay upon his heart. Suddenly this fear assumed definite shape.

“They can cable,” he cried wildly, “to the police at Sydney, and I shall be lost!”

But the fresh morning air speedily cooled his fevered imagination and reinvigorated his jaded memory.

“Bah! I am unhinged!” he exclaimed. “These little worries, this inability to introduce any blood into my crime, have made me foolishly nervous. Of course, the cable comes after the steamship and the railway, and I am saved!”

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And the last that England heard of the Baron Verdigris was a wild cry of joy which burst from his lips as he fled on his way to Southampton.

CHAPTER II.

THE Baron is still riding hard.

There is now no white about the foam that completely clothes his steed as with a garment: it is all red, and the Baron is strangely happy, for is not blood his favourite compound? But the stallion seems to be less pleased: proud as he is,—the hero of a hundred fights,—his steps begin to falter, and once he all but stumbles over a tufted knoll.

At last, however, Southampton and the sea-beach are gained. The good steed has done his duty: with one last long look at his friend and master, a look that is half of pride and wholly affectionate, he

Baron Verdigris

sinks upon the sand, gives vent to three low moans, and then is very still.

Baron Verdigris was much moved; which was exactly the noble and chivalrous sentiment that one who knew him well would have expected of him. In fact, he was on the point of kneeling beside his dead companion on the sand, in order to shed tears of tribute, when he espied a merchant-vessel under full sail. At that moment the vessel was in a place, well known in the old days of Southampton, though now, alas, gone with many another ancient land and sea-mark, a place named by the rough seafaring Britons of the coast, "Ye Offynges."

Baron Verdigris realised that there was not a moment to be lost.

"Farewell, my faithful steed!" he cried, a rare tear starting to the humid midnight of his eyes.

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Then he leaped into the waves. Any one but the Baron would have had to wade through the shallow water as a preliminary, but my hero was above such trifles. He struck out boldly and in no long time reached the Offynge, where he had first espied the merchantman. By this time the good ship, answering nobly to her straining canvas and to the bulky helm, was a full two miles to leeward.

It was one side of the Baron's character that he could measure accurately with his eye any distance not exceeding two English standard miles. He cast a hasty glance at the retreating ship.

His face lit up.

"Exactly two standard miles!" he exclaimed joyously. "It certainly cannot be more, because I can measure the distance accurately with the naked eye.

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If it had been nautical miles, now, I should have been lost. The difference between the two miles is, approximately, 806.7 feet: I am capable of swimming exactly three standard miles more, and I can just overtake her as she completes the third mile from here. The difference in three miles comes to 2420.1 feet, which would have made all the difference. As it is, I am saved."

It must not be thought that Baron Verdigris was wasting precious time by staying to make these calculations. On the contrary, at the moment when his face lit up, as described above, he had begun to strike out, swiftly but steadily, towards the ship, and the above soliloquy occurred while he was rapidly overhauling the object of his quest.

With what minute accuracy the Baron had calculated the limit of his strength

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will be apparent when it is known that he reached the vessel just as it had described three standard miles from the Offynge, with the exception of one foot.

A sailor quickly threw a rope to him, and the Baron was hauled up on to the deck. Directly his feet touched the creaking boards he gave vent to an observation that was touched with the man's remarkable individuality.

"I could have swum one more foot!" he cried proudly.

I have omitted to mention a fact which made the Baron's feat still more extraordinary than would appear at first sight.

When he left the chamber of the Lady Meningitis, he cut off with his sword a goodly lock of her shining hair. This was significant. Did it indicate affection or merely utility?

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That it was useful in point of fact became evident to the Baron as he stood on the sea-shore. Even for him it would have been difficult to swim in a complete suit of armour, and a happy thought struck him. The Lady Meningitis' hair was of a most extraordinary length. He passed the strands through and through, round and round the pieces of his armour, tied the two ends firmly into a reef-knot, and inserted the knot between his teeth.

This method proved effectual, for when he was hauled on deck, his armour, still intact, came up after him, clanging against the weather-beaten timbers of the ship. It is strange, if one thinks of it, that a collection of such fragile threads should be capable of bearing so great a tension. To me it affords the strongest possible proof of that wise saw of our nineteenth century, to the effect that

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Beauty is Strength. For who dare deny that the hair of the Lady Meningitis was beautiful beyond words? Certainly not the Baron Verdigris, as he tenderly unfastened the knot and released his armour from its voluptuous bondage. One chronicle even records that the Baron kissed the lock of hair, but the evidence is not sufficiently strong to warrant us in accepting this story as true. Besides, it would tend, if verified, to spoil the mystery of this Romance.

Having carefully donned all his varied accoutrements and fastened his trusty rope to the mast, in order that the fresh sea-air might thoroughly dry it, he called to the sailor who had first helped him.

“Ho, varlet!” he cried, “call me the captain, the skipper, the master of thy ship, by whichever of these names he is

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known to thee, and tell him that the Baron Verdigris demands an audience."

The Baron used the word "demands" advisedly. He realised clearly that he must make haste to establish his *prestige*, for he would soon be too ill to think of claiming the deference due to his prowess and to his long line of ancestors.

The sailor perceptibly trembled at the appearance of Baron Verdigris, at the haughtiness of his tone, but even more at the splendour of his noble name.

"I go full quickly, my liege," he responded timorously.

"'Tis well," was all the Baron vouchsafed in answer. Not that there was really any need for reply; any one less courteous than was Baron Verdigris would have let the cringing varlet depart without a word.

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The Master speedily appeared and made low obeisance to the Baron. The latter uttered one word—but there was a wealth of meaning concealed in the draperies of that word.

“Blood!” he said impressively.

The Master seemed to understand perfectly. You see, he was an old salt, which explains a good deal.

He answered nothing, but there was a rapid and temporary closing of the eye which lay a-port of the Baron’s line of vision. The latter resumed,—

“I must reach Sydney. Art thou thither bound?”

Again the master obeised, and there was never a muscle moved upon his face as he made answer,—

“Yea, verily, my liege, are we bound direct for the place my liege is pleased to mention.”

Baron Verdigris

"'Tis good," the Baron muttered. Then he raised his voice again.

"Here is store of gold," he said, almost carelessly, pointing to a purse of thick chain-work that was suspended from his waist by a belt of steel.

I am sorry to appear discursive, but it is my desire to make my book not only full of incident, but also in some measure of an analytical nature ; so that I must call the attention of the reader to two slight turns of expression which might otherwise have escaped his notice. It will be observed that the chain-work of the purse was *thick*, that is, so thick that its contents were invisible, and also that the Baron spoke *almost carelessly*. Remembering that the Baron was singularly gifted with a capacity for Diplomacy, need I say more ?

The Master hesitated a little ; it

Baron Verdigris

almost appeared as though he would have liked to see the contents of the purse.

The Baron waxed wroth.

“Ha, caitiff!” he cried, “dost doubt the honour of a Verdigris?”

He accompanied his words by a furious jangling of the purse, which evidently contained metal of some kind. The Master seemed to be somewhat relieved by the sound, for he hastened once more to obeise.

“Nay, my liege,” quoth he, “think not thus hardly of thy servant. I did but desire to tell thee that I need no guerdon. The work of these honest hands gives me more than is needful for my simple wants. I bear thee gladly for love of thy noble name.”

The Baron’s innate generosity and kindness asserted itself.

Baron Verdigris

“Nay, skipper,” he said warmly, “thou art too simple-minded, too honest, for these stirring days. I give thee gold, half what my purse containeth, when thou landest me upon the shores of Sydney.”

It was a pretty scene—the bluff old sea-dog on the one hand, and the courtly, refined noble on the other, each striving to outvie the other in generosity. But still prettier was the smile on the face of Baron Verdigris as the skipper turned away.

For many days the Baron was exceedingly ill. His worst fears—and they had been sufficiently strong upon that score—were speedily realised, and it would have been hard to discern, in the countenance that gazed so wistfully over the side of the good ship *Norman King*, the features of Baron Verdigris, the

Baron Verdigris

noble, the courageous, the squire of beauteous dames.

While he is in this pitiable condition, into the details of which only the most vulgar Realism could allow itself to pry, let me stop for a moment to mention an interesting fact. It will, no doubt, be as pleasant for the reader to hear as for me to narrate that the ships of those days were of the most rudimentary kind, and that the master and crew of the *Norman King* were absolutely guileless in the matter of the Positive Direction. Hence it will be quite unnecessary for me to dwell at any length upon the details of her construction, or even upon the eccentricities of the individual members of her crew.

This is singularly fortunate for all of us; because some writers of modern times, in writing of things nautical, have

Baron Verdigris

often been obliged to fill quite half their books with technicalities ; and the language in which these writers themselves describe their vessels, and in which they make the creatures of their imagination talk, is not only "caviare to the general," but even unattractive to such as love the study of strange tongues.

When I say, however, that the *Norman King* in no way anticipated the benefits that belonged in fairness solely to Posterity, I cannot be held responsible for anything that may happen after the arrival of Baron Verdigris upon her decks. That was part of the man's rare charm—one could never have the slightest idea what *would* happen when he came upon any scene. But, if my gloomiest anticipations should prove to be correct, and the *Norman King* chances, later in this Romance, to give birth to

Baron Verdigris

any inventions more modern than she had a right to, I am resolved to pass over the details of these irregular births with as light a hand as possible.

To return to the Baron Verdigris.

When at length he became accustomed to the strangeness of the vessel's motions, and his feelings of despair had so far yielded to the bracing properties of the half-gale screaming among the cordage that he could look about him with a freshly-awakened sense that there *was*, after all, capacity for interest in future events: when, I repeat, he had attained this desirable frame of mind, the ship was making all speed towards the Straits of Gibraltar.

As she entered the Straits, the Baron was leaning dreamily over the side and watching the blue refulgence of the baby waves. Suddenly he looked up

Baron Verdigris

and at once recognised the high rock-wall that formed the northern boundary of the Straits. His face clouded—forming in its lurid darkness a vigorous and artistic contrast to the sunlit peace around him—and he gave vent to a low exclamation, expressive of pain and consternation.

Then he rose and began to pace the deck, talking rapidly to himself.

“We are entering the Mediterranean,” he said excitedly; “what means this thing? Can it be that the captain has forgotten that the Isthmus of Suez comes later, and is proceeding in the hope of getting out of what is virtually a *cul de sac*? Or,” he went on after a pause, “is he in the pay of Scotland Yard, and only waiting for a favourable opportunity to deliver me into their hands?”

Baron Verdigris cursed aloud as the

Baron Verdigris

last thought occurred to him. His vocabulary was extensive, as befitted an English gentleman of his lofty rank, and I fear that his remarks upon the present occasion will hardly bear repetition.

As he cursed, he turned his eyes to the mocking blue of the cloudless heavens, as if to find some help there ; and in doing so he espied the captain comfortably perched upon the topmost spar of the mast. This was the captain's favourite position, whenever his arduous duties permitted him to abandon himself to well-earned ease ; and this morning he was wrapped in deep slumber.

The Baron called loudly, but was unable to awaken the sleeping form of the man who had betrayed him. He (the Baron), however, was a man of resources, and he quickly fitted an arrow to the bow which he never failed to carry

Baron Verdigris

cunningly concealed upon his person. Then he aimed with such a nicety of precision that the arrow passed playfully through the fleshy part of the skipper's right leg.

This method proved efficacious, for the man awoke with a start and nearly fell from his perch. The Baron called to him once more, and this time the captain, by way of answer, slid lightly down the mast and landed, bowing low, at the feet of Baron Verdigris.

"I trust I hurt thee not," said the latter courteously.

"Nay, my liege," responded the skipper, with a politeness as great as, if more rudely expressed than, that of the Baron, "nay, my liege, thou didst but let out a little of that blood that hath a tendency to fill me more full than is good for my health."

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“Well said, skipper!” cried the Baron. “And now to the business touching which I summoned thee.”

The Baron stopped for a half-moment, in order to give full effect to his next words, and then, glancing surreptitiously at the captain, in that peculiar manner which at once proclaimed his genius for Diplomacy, he asked abruptly :

“What about Sydney ?”

It was a master-stroke (in more senses than one, remembering the position occupied by the man before him). The skipper’s face grew pale beneath its years of tan, and he trembled violently.

“Tell me all!” said the Baron peremptorily.

The wretched man sank upon his knees before the Baron and implored his mercy.

“I will confess everything, my liege!”

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he cried. "When thou camest on board and I saw that thou wast so goodly a knight, so well-favoured both in body and in arms, a great awe of thee fell upon my wretched self; so that when thou didst ask if my ship was journeying to—to——"

"Sydney," put in the Baron.

"To Sydney, I was, of good truth, overmuch affrighted to tell thee that never had I even heard mention of the place."

As he spoke a new idea occurred to the Baron, which he hastened to express in an old form, contrary to the usual practice of clothing an old conception in a new form.

Suddenly, in a flash, as it were, he realised that a strange error of memory had been committed by him, in spite of the efforts he had made to be thoroughly calm and self-possessed.

Baron Verdigris

“By the shade of my Lady Meningitis,” he cried, “Sydney cometh after!”

It is almost pathetic to note how frequently the phrase “comes after” was upon the Baron’s lips in those days of perplexity.

The manner of his last oath will show students of the Baron’s history how thoroughly *sui generis* the man was. Any ordinary knight would have sworn by the lady whom he loved; but the Baron’s invariable practice was to adopt as his lady for the time being the latest victim of his homicidal art. He was above the mere triviality of falling in love—at least he thought so; but perhaps in the case of the Lady Meningitis—eh?

With a delicate laugh at the expense of his own folly, and a graceful inclination of his head to the wondering skipper:

Baron Verdigris

“Tarantulas and humming birds!” quoth he. “Thou art bewildered, captain! But fear not, I forgive thee thy offence and look to thee for faithful service in the future. Thou hast made me the happiest of mortals, sirrah, because thou recallest to my erring mind that neither does Scotland Yard come in my time. I am saved!”

The skipper merely obeised. It saved him the trouble of finding words suitable for so delicate a crisis.

“And now,” resumed Baron Verdigris, “since I am in no danger of pursuit, methinks a pleasure trip, personally conducted—by the skipper of the *Norman King*,” he added hastily, and as though he was upon the point of letting words escape him which it was not good for the unlettered fellow at his side to hear, “would be jovial, would be festive,

Baron Verdigris

would be, in short, the thing most suitable to the occasion. Now answer me, worthy seafarer, tanned by the suns of a century, whither goest thou? ”

The skipper hesitated. Then, after a silence of perhaps fifteen seconds and a half,

“ My liege,” he said, “ of good truth I cannot be said to go any whither. This ship belongeth to a limited company, and I am paid by time; therefore little care I whither I go, so that the journey be long enow. I have no direction.”

“ No positive direction? ” queried the Baron. It was an injudicious remark, but the Baron’s desire to perpetrate a delicate *bon-mot* overcame his prudence for the moment. The indiscretion cost him nothing, after all, for the Master interpreted his meaning according to his own lights.

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“No, my liege,” he replied, “I am not positive about the direction which I am taking.”

“’Tis well!” quoth Baron Verdigris. “Fortune is upon our side. Thou canst earn honest gold from thine employers, and I can have my pleasure trip. Keep just so much direction, skipper, that we run not into rocks, but otherwise let us sail by chance.”

The skipper inclined the upper part of his body at an angle of 45° to the vertical, and departed. The Baron merely used his alternative expression.

“’Tis well,” he said simply.

CHAPTER III.

MEANWHILE, we must return to the Lady Meningitis, lying poisoned within her chamber.

Whatever might be the feelings of Baron Verdigris towards the lady, whether he was subconsciously in love with her, as has been hinted, or whether his sentiments partook of the purer, nobler, more lofty nature of Causeless Blood-thirstiness, untainted by the grosser touch of Passion; one thing was certain—that the Lady Meningitis was horribly in love with the fascinating Baron. Finding that she was in that condition when words are useless to express the sentiments, she had relieved her feelings in

Baron Verdigris -

some measure by a little act of *recherché* delicacy.

Knowing the Baron's passion for having all the surroundings of his crimes thoroughly artistic and in harmony with one another, she had occupied no less than three hours, as mortals reckon time (which is, if they only knew it, essentially timeless and ephemerally eternal),—she had spent, I repeat, three hours in the completion of her toilette.

Her taste was unimpeachable, and, seeing the suitability of pure white as the colour of her draperies, realising how divinely suggestive was such a costume at once of the deathbed and of the marriage ceremony, she was dressed, when the Baron appeared in her chamber, in a manner calculated to gratify even his fastidious desires.

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She was attired in clinging draperies of soft white bengaline, the foot of the skirt being frilled with valuable Duchesse lace ; and rich folds of dreamy *chiffon* nestled round the swan-like brilliancy of her neck. Trails of orange-blossom drooping downwards from the bodice hid themselves coyly among the folds of the skirt, while a *jabot* of creamy old lace and deep cuffs of the same substance, which finished off the full drooping sleeves, completed the suggestion of bridaldom that it had been her effort to attain. Among her hair lay the white artificiality of Christmas roses, adding just that funereal touch which was wanted.

Of course the Baron had been charmed to find a maiden so in sympathy with all that was worst and widest in his own views, and he had

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stayed a moment at the door, after the consummation of the deed, to watch her as she lay there on the couch, so beautiful in death, so incapable now of ever shattering the ideal qualities which she appeared to the beholder to possess.

It was a trifle odd that neither she nor the Baron remembered that the death from powdered glass was an extremely slow one, but then you must recollect that she was in love, and he was—what?

While the Baron was urging on his restive and bloodily-foaming stallion, as described in a former chapter, the breezes came in through the open casement and sang a low song around the prostrate form of the Lady Meningitis. The words of the song were exquisitely sad and tender.

Baron Verdigris

Dead lies the fair, frail Lady Meningitis,
Let saddest feathers fall where'er the wild dove's
flight is.

Of old the breezes led her,
But now the maid is deader
Than we dare dream.

Dead lies the fair, frail Lady Meningitis,
Let clouds make darkness where the full moon's
light is.

For where was heard her laughter
There only cometh after
The gaunt ghost's scream.

Dead lies the fair, frail Lady Meningitis,
And where the full bloom was, alone the maggot's
blight is.

And while the world is weeping
The maiden deep is sleeping,
Touched by no dream.

There was such a sobbing of these
breezes as they sang the words, such
an uncontrollable wailing when they
had finished their song, that the Lady
Meningitis, some inner sense penetrated

Baron Verdigris

by their music and their grief, rose slowly from her horizontal position, put out two little feet from beneath their white covering, and moved softly over to the casement.

As she leant out of the window, she saw a blaze in the courtyard beneath, and perceived that the straw with which it was littered was burning with a merriment ill-befitting the dolorous message it conveyed to her. For did she not know that her Baron Verdigris was ever a furious rider, and that the cause of the fire could be none other than the sparks struck by the flying hoofs of his steed?

“And so he has fled!” she said sadly.
“Gone, altogether gone, my Verdigris!”

Soon, however, she awoke to the capabilities of her position.

“I am a *fin-de-siècle* woman,” she

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mused,—“*fin de mon propre, le onzième, siècle*, I mean. As such my duty is quite clear. The circumstances are singularly charming and appropriate for the dissection of my feelings. I must analyse myself.”

She clapped her little hands together joyously—for there was still much of the girl, the winsome maid, about her, in spite of everything.

“Yes,” she went on, “it was evident that I could not in common decency love any but a desperately wicked person : that makes it fortunate indeed that my affections have concentrated themselves upon the Baron Verdigris. Not only does he revel in murder and bathe in gore to an absolutely illimitable extent, but he has compassed—in using the word ‘compassed’ I refer to his intention, which is the only real good in

Baron Verdigris

any action—he has compassed the death of myself, the most perfect creature in existence—or in pre- or post-existence, for that matter.

“This was beautiful of him, and at last I realise that he is worthy of my love. I am his!”

“Yet,” she resumed more passionately, “just when I *have* realised this, he has left me, perhaps for ever. Ah, cruel, cruel fate!”

Her mood assumed another phase.

“Yet—still, yet, again, as the French Grammars say, meaning that I would gladly cry ‘*encore*’ to all his kisses—yet I cannot but feel that this Baron loves me very dearly. Why? Because—oh, subtlety!—because something tells me he *knew* that powdered glass was not yet invented as a method of poisoning. Thus, he has all the merit

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of his crime without the loss to both of us that would have been involved in my permanent death.”

She broke off her musings to glide over to the harp that stood in the centre of the room. On this instrument she accompanied herself to the following song, which revealed all the hidden currents of her emotions.

Verdigris, oh Verdigris!
My love for thee will never cease.
The night is dark that tempests lash,
But not so dark as thy moustache,
My Verdigris!

Oh, Baron bold and bad,
Thou Something male and mad,
I love thee deep,
Tho' the way be steep
That leads to my Verdigris.

This was sung *prestissimo passionato*, but the music became gradually more and

Baron Verdigris

more tender and soft, until, in a voice literally vibrating with dreamy sadness and ineffable despair, she began to sing once more.

Will there come a day
In the far-away,
After the years shall pass,
Hand-in-hand, when your lips shall say,
"Love, half in earnest, half in play,
I gave you the powdered glass?"
"Powdered glass!" What a sweet refrain,
When it steals to the tune of a thought's
glad pain!
Such a thought as I share
With the roses there,
That whisper it alway in sun or rain.
What is the thought, my Verdigris?
Shall I speed it tenderly over seas?
Yes, I will tell thee
This that makes wealthy
Me who am loved of my Verdigris.

Here the air of the song became recitative.

Baron Verdigris

It is that thou didst long
In sin to be full strong,
 Yea, worse than Cain.
I love thy fair intention,
But more I love prevention,
 That is love's gain.

For when thou cam'st to do it,
Love bade thee half eschew it,
 And save thy lass ;
And so death was prevented,
Because not yet invented
 Was powdered glass.

Prestissimo passionato once more.

Verdigris, oh Verdigris !
My love for thee will never cease.
 The night is dark that tempests lash,
 But not so dark as thy moustache,
 My Verdigris !

Oh, Baron bold and bad,
Thou Something male and mad,
 I love thee deep,
 Tho' the way be steep
 That leads to my Verdigris.

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Then the Lady Meningitis let her fingers play lightly over the strings of the harp for some time. Suddenly her face grew pale, and she twanged one of the strings so vigorously that it broke with a sharp, rasping sound, and cut deep into her finger. Yet even now, when it was a thought of the Baron's shortcomings that had caused this rapid change in her emotions, even now the love that she bore this man prompted her next words.

"Ah, that he were here!" she sighed softly. "He was always so fond of blood!"

She bound up the wounded finger, with a vicious energy that infinitely became her, and then proceeded to pace the chamber hurriedly.

"Is it moral," she cried, with all her womanly desire to do the right upper-

Baron Verdigris

most in her thoughts, "is it moral for me to harbour any longer the image of this Baron within my breast? An awful thought has just occurred to me—Baron Verdigris, *my* Verdigris, as I have called him more than once in the retirement of my chamber, has always scorned love-affairs. He has been too wrapped up in his Art to spare time or attention for such things, and consequently I fear that he has not been implicated in one single *amour*. Oh, wretched Ego that I am! I am undone! For how can I give myself to a man who has no past loves to explain, no grounds for jealousy to offer the woman who is to become his wife?"

She paused, distracted, and laid her head upon the window-sill to cool her fevered brow. At last she roused herself, and a look of great resolve was in her face as she stood erect.

Baron Verdigris

“I will give him one chance,” she cried. “Well as I know the Baron’s conscientious dislike of using the advantages of the Positive Direction, yet the end, in this particular case, will more than justify the means. I will telegraph to him.”

She considered long and earnestly what route the Baron was likely to have taken, and finally came to the conclusion that the Mediterranean was the most probable sea in which to find him, and that he would be pretty sure to touch at Malta. Whatever may be said or thought of the Lady Meningitis, at least this much must be said for her, that she behaved really very well in thus guessing correctly the Baron’s future *locus*; because it helps the plot of this romance more than a little.

She quickly went over to her writing-

Baron Verdigris

desk, took out a telegraph form and wrote thereon these words :

“ To the BARON VERDIGRIS, MALTA. Poste Restante.

“ If you wish to win the love of the Lady Meningitis, you must be more consistently wicked than heretofore, and indulge in at least a few *amours*.”

With this message in her hand she hastened from the chamber that was echoing to so many emotional effects, and proceeded to the nearest telegraph-office. It had too important a bearing upon the future of two human beings to be entrusted to a servant, who would be essentially inhuman and incapable of realising the responsibility attached to such a mission.

As she hurried along the bridle-path that led from the Castle grounds, she

Baron Verdigris

rapidly counted the number of words in the message.

“Thirty-four,” she said to herself. “It will be expensive, but then extravagance is the truest economy in a matter of this serious nature.”

Arrived at the telegraph-office she handed in the paper to the clerk.

“One and five-pence, please, miss,” he said, apparently forgetting that the telegram was to go beyond the boundaries of Great Britain.

“But the Positive Direction takes one to the sixpenny telegram,” said the Lady Meningitis, firing the light from her lustrous eyes full at the telegraph-clerk.

He was much moved.

“Yes, miss,——”

“My lady.”

“Yes, my lady ; but the cost for a telegram exceeding twelve words is still

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the same—a halfpenny per word, my lady.”

“Well,” said the Lady Meningitis plaintively, “it is hard, very hard, but I suppose it must be so.”

At her words, even more at the tone in which they were uttered, the clerk was entirely overcome.

“I will make it a shilling, my Lady, and supply the balance from my own pocket.”

Her eyes became moist as she heard this expression of a fellow-being’s charity and good-will, and she touched his hand lightly with her own for perhaps the tenth of a second.

“You are too good,” she murmured gratefully, as she handed him the shilling.

As she was returning, she whispered to herself :

Baron Verdigris

“And in the meantime I will allow myself to dream of him ; I will imagine that he is acting in a manner worthy of himself.”

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE he was, all unconsciously, the cause of so much anxiety to the lady whom he had left upon her death-bed, the Baron Verdigris had arrived at Malta.

At the moment when we next catch sight of him, he was watching the process of coaling the *Norman King*. Being surprised at this action on the part of a crew whom he had thought to be ignorant of things beyond their own times, he at length summoned the Captain.

“What does this mean?” he asked coldly, piercing the skipper with a glance from his dark eyes.

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As usual, the skipper obeised and trembled.

"I cannot tell, my liege," he said; "I have no knowledge of its meaning. I suppose that this is coal, but what its uses are, if any, and why we are crowding with it the already scanty storage-room of my ship, I cannot tell."

"Then why do it?" asked the Baron, a trifle rudely. Yet his question was indeed a somewhat natural one.

"Nay, my liege," returned the Master deprecatingly, "it seemed to be the proper and conventional thing to do, so for the reputation of the noble knight on board, we could but proceed with the work as speedily as might be — and," he added, "we can always throw it out when we get beyond sight of the harbour."

"'Tis well," the Baron said—there

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was a sameness about many of his remarks that testified to his innate good breeding and culture. "And now do thou tarry here until I return. I have a fancy to explore this island."

As he strolled through the streets of the port he chanced to come upon the Post Office, and a strange, unbidden desire to enter took possession of him. This desire, of course, was due to mesmeric attraction between the Lady Meningitis and himself: I need hardly mention that.

"Is there any communication for Baron Verdigris here?" he asked, scarcely knowing why.

"Yes, sir," responded the clerk. "Telegram, sir, to be left till called for."

"Ha!" said the Baron, as he took the yellow missive and tore open the outer integuments.

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“ Any answer, sir ? ”

“ No,” answered the Baron curtly.

Then he turned, left the office, and betook himself along the high-road that led out of the town away into the surrounding country.

“ ‘ If you wish to win the love of the Lady Meningitis,’ ” he said to himself meditatively. “ Do I wish to win it ? ”

Then he began to walk faster, as if striving to stifle some thought that came unbidden into his breast.

“ Bah ! ” he muttered testily, “ why ask myself the question ? Of course I do not desire it—besides, the condition she imposes is monstrous, absurd : I cannot waste time upon these trifles.”

In spite, however, of his certainty that he had no interest in the affair, he resolved to wait some little time before answering the wire which the Lady

Baron Verdigris

Meningitis had sent. "*Festina lente,*" he said to himself slowly. "I will take a little time for reflection."

After coming to this decision, Baron Verdigris proceeded with a light heart to look around him and survey the beauties of the landscape. Soon, however, he began to grow weary of walking, and a great desire fell on him to be once more on horseback.

At this juncture he espied a Maltese knight caracoling towards him upon a splendid steed. The horse was pure white, with the exception of a blood-red skull and cross-bones that grinned horridly from the centre of his forehead, while his master was clad *cap-à-pie* in a suit of chain armour. In his hand lay a lance at rest, and his open vizor revealed his noble, if somewhat sultry, lineaments.

Baron Verdigris

The Baron started as his eyes fell upon the steed.

“There goes a horse,” he cried, “such as I have longed to possess for many years! How sweetly emblematic of death he is! Ha, grammercy and battle-axes, but I must make him mine!”

So saying he approached the stranger-knight and held up his mailed right hand to indicate that he would speak with him.

The stranger courteously reined in his champing war-horse and bowed to Baron Verdigris.

“Sir,” began the Baron, bowing in his turn, “let us take a walk down Fleet Street—I mean, most noble Seignior and thrice puissant Knight, wilt thou make me for ever glorious by deigning to let thy lance hold parley with mine own? I have a fancy for that steed of thine ;

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and either way, to whichever side equal fortune lets the wondering scale-pan sway, shall I be of good cheer—for if I go beneath the fruitful mother-earth, hastened thitherward by thy noble hand, shall I receive great honour in Valhalla, because thou didst account me worthy of thy steel; and, on the other hand, illustrious Seignior, if I chance to win, I at once obtain thy steed and attain the pinnacle of Fame.”

The Baron was absolutely *au fait* with all the punctilious requirements of etiquette, and, accordingly, well recognised that he must make an opening speech of at least five minutes when he had a noble of equal birth before him.

When he had finished, the stranger merely bowed once more. The fact was, he guessed from the Baron's appearance that he was English, and, in

Baron Verdigris

spite of not having the least idea of what Baron Verdigris meant, he was loth to confess his ignorance of so fashionable a language.

The Baron felt somewhat hurt by the calm, unresponsive bearing of the man, but in a moment he guessed the true state of affairs, and recommenced the above speech, omitting the little remark about Fleet Street, in the best Maltese. A knowledge of all European languages, and a capacity to speak them fluently, was a further side to his versatility, as perhaps I need scarcely have mentioned.

The Maltese Knight was deeply sensible of the Baron's fair courtesy of speech, and was especially struck by his delicate introduction of semi-classical similes—for book-learning was not common among these ancient Knights of the Road.

Baron Verdigris

At once the stranger responded to the overtures of his friendly antagonist by leaping from his horse, the bridle of which he attached to the trunk of a neighbouring tree.

“I meet thee on equal terms!” he cried.

The two combatants then stood back to back, holding their lances in rest, and proceeded to take fifty paces away from each other. This done, they turned sharply and made for one another with all speed, until they were within ten paces of each other. Then they stopped dead.

“You understand?” said Baron Verdigris, with a meaning smile.

“Perfectly!” answered the other.

“I spare thy life, good knight,” the Baron resumed.

“Good-night,” incautiously answered the stranger.

Baron Verdigris

“Eh?” exclaimed the Baron quickly.

The stranger hastened to correct his error.

“Noble sir,” he said, “I am full proud to be vanquished by one who is not only so skilful at the warlike play, but also so generous and so courteous. The steed is thine.”

“I accept the gift, fair knight,” said the Baron graciously.

“I have a request unto thee, Prince.”

It was the stranger knight who had re-opened the conversation, which, truth to say, shewed signs of hanging a little.

“It is granted even before it is asked. Be pleased to name it.”

“That I may go with thee on whatever quest thou art bound.”

“That, noble sir, is a favour that I was myself on the point of demanding

Baron Verdigris

at thy hands. Henceforth we are as brothers."

Their mailed hands met in the grip of fellowship.

"And now," said Baron Verdigris, "let us proceed. I go in search of gore."

"And I in quest of my Lady Gora."

"So I thought. My Lady is her sister."

"Of good truth are we fallen in fortunate ways. We can quest together—for it is an axiom that sisters ever share the same wood-nest."

The Baron untethered the steed and gaily leaped upon his back.

"His name, fair stranger, and more fair brother?" he asked.

"Morcaput, by token of his forehead."

"'Tis well—a fitting name for steed of mine! And now, away! It pains

Baron Verdigris

me, brother, that thou must walk, but after all, it is merely a simple illustration of Positional Inversion. Before, thou rodest and I followed—now, I ride and thou followest.”

“I fear ’twill be a long way behind, Prince, if so be that thou progressest faster than a walking-pace.”

“I’ good faith, Knight, thou wrongest me by such a thought. I shall go full slowly until such time as we chance upon a steed for thee.”

The Baron, while uttering these words, caracoled his steed, partly from sheer lightness of heart, partly from a desire to test its worthiness. As he did so, his thoughts drifted into an odd vein of fantasy.

“‘I knew by this piece of service that the man would caracole.’ Whose are the words?” he murmured.

Baron Verdigris

“Hence, pestilential Positivism!” he added, as he remembered the name of the author. “It is the posterital Shakespeare.”

“Six goodly knights!” It was this exclamation, proceeding from his companion, that interrupted his thoughts.

Baron Verdigris looked in the direction indicated by the stranger’s forefinger, and saw a group of men seated on a stretch of level sward that lay in front of them.

Six of the company were English Knights, accoutred similarly to himself, while the seventh, who was rotund of body and rubicund of visage, was clothed in the simple garb of a monk.

The two brothers in arms came up to them, and, greetings over (which need not be detailed, being much the same in all these cases), they learnt that the

Baron Verdigris

monk was one Peter the Hermit, bent upon compassing the capture of Jerusalem, while his companions were knights whom he had converted to the good cause.

In their turn, the noble pair introduced themselves as Baron Verdigris, an English noble of the purest water (blood, that is to say), and the Knight Brandolo, a Maltese warrior, extracted only from the best grapes of heredity. And their business, they added, was the quest of the sisters Gore and Gora.

Preliminaries thus satisfactorily arranged, they all sat down to an *al fresco* picnic of boar's flesh, venison and green herbs, the whole being washed down with several gallons of the choicest Amontillado, for which the countless apologies of Peter the Hermit were a little unnecessary.

Baron Verdigris

As the generous wine loosened their tongues, they became exceedingly outspoken concerning their purposes.

“Within a few days,” said Peter, “we purpose journeying to England to urge on the work of recruiting for the Crusade to be waged against Heathendom.”

“First Crusade, 1095,” murmured the Baron half-unconsciously.

Peter the Hermit looked up quickly. The wine would seem to have rendered him somewhat credulous.

“What! art thou a prophet?” he cried.

“Distinctly,” responded the Baron, throwing a wealth of honest expression into his eyes. “Prophecy is my strong point.”

He said this, partly from a feeling of vanity, which is innate in the best of us, partly from a desire to conceal from the

Baron Verdigris

worthy monk that he had slipped into an error ill-befitting his knightly name.

"That being so," responded Peter, "we have a clear two years in which to do absolutely nothing. We allow ourselves six months in which to gather forces. 'Tis well that we may rest ourselves before joining issue with our foes."

An idea occurred to Baron Verdigris. As has been hinted at, this was a thing that had happened not once nor twice only, but many times, during the last few years. It was a part of the curse that the Direction brought upon him.

The present idea was, that he could find enough gore to satisfy even himself in a war with the warrior Saracens, and that this course would be infinitely more interesting than compassing a few odd murders in the island, as had been his

Baron Verdigris

original intention. His manner of expressing himself to Peter the Hermit was redolent of that delicate figurativeness which had been in evidence in his previous conversation with Brandolo.

“Reverend Hermit,” he said, turning to the monk, “something tells me that I shall find my Lady Gore within the walls of Jerusalem, and there only. I proceed thither on the morrow. Wilt thou and thy noble knights join me? and we shall, I doubt not, prove superior to the heathen horde. — Of course, the affair will be quite informal, and we can still leave the name of First Crusade to the future.”

The knights who followed Peter the Hermit accepted the idea joyously. With one accord they rose to their feet, and rent the welkin with a simultaneous shout.

Baron Verdigris

“Oddzooks and periwinkles!” they cried, “a noble scheme!”

Peter seemed less pleased. Perhaps he felt eager for the rest of which he had, a moment ago, made so sure. However, in no long time his old enthusiasm was rekindled, and a remark made by the Knight Brandolo determined the issue.

“If the Lady Gore is in Jerusalem,” he said, “it follows that the Lady Gora is there also. My quest is thine, Baron Verdigris.”

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE the Lady Menigitis was anxiously awaiting a message of some kind from her Baron Verdigris, and, in consequence of the license which she had allowed herself in the matter of dreaming of him while his decision was pending, she was becoming every day more and more hopelessly enamoured of him. The fact was that the Lady was beginning to forget even the immoral paucity of the Baron's love affairs, and she so far proved her innate femininity that she felt she could accept him, if by good fortune he were to reappear within his castle, in spite of everything, and that they could be very happy together.

Baron Verdigris

One morning, as she went wearily down the long flight of stairs and into the courtyard without, a curious sight presented itself to her. It will be remembered that the Baron's valet had uttered some mysterious words on the occasion of his master's hurried flight. He seemed to have been repeating them ever since, with a conscientiousness worthy of a better cause. For on this morning he was moving slowly, almost painfully, upon his hands and knees about the courtyard, muttering to himself: "I know what I know."

The Lady Meningitis stopped, puzzled as to the meaning of the man's movements. He had a small piece of stick in his hand, with notches along it at regular intervals, and from time to time he laid it on the ground as if in the act of measuring something.

Baron Verdigris

Presently a light broke in upon her—and with the coming of light there came also, as a matter of course, a great alarm and terror. What the man was doing was only too evident to her now—he was measuring the hoof-prints of the Baron's steed, and this with the purpose of tracking him, her loved one, to certain doom. The weather had been exceptionally fine since the Baron's hurried exit from his castle, and the marks of his horse's feet stood out clearly defined—all the more so that the fire which we mentioned previously had thoroughly baked the clay which formed the floor of the yard.

In her terror she screamed aloud: which was weak, as she at once recognised. But the man did not take the slightest notice of her. He still went on measuring.

Baron Verdigris

“Sirrah,” began the Lady Meningitis, with only the least suspicion of a tremor in her voice to testify to the tense condition of her emotions, “Sirrah, what doest thou?”

The man went on measuring.

The Lady repeated her question.

The man went on measuring.

“I command thee, knave,” the Lady cried angrily. “Tell me what thou doest.”

This time the man looked up—furtively, and with a scowl upon his face.

“I know what I know,” he said impressively.

“Art thou quite sure?” asked the Lady.

“Yea,” answered the man, “it is an inherited quality with me.”

There was an educated refinement of speech about this menial that was sug-

Baron Verdigris

gestive of a variegated Past. Perhaps he had been—many things.

“Won’t you refrain from tracking a kind and generous master?” pleaded the Lady, rapidly changing her tactics.

The man glanced up this time, and there was an expression of sullen determination upon his face.

“Look here, my Lady,” he said slowly, “don’t you see that I’ve got to go through with what I’m engaged on at present? I’ve found a clue—a lot of them, although they *do* all measure the same; and having found it, I’m morally bound to go through with it. Do you think, my Lady, I enjoy grovelling on my hands and knees?” he broke off savagely.

“I shouldn’t have thought so,” put in the Lady Meningitis quietly.

“No, I should just think I don’t!

Baron Verdigris

But I'm not the man to neglect my duty to morality and to my master. Every morning since Baron Verdigris left have I gone round this courtyard and measured every hoof-print. Why, if I wasn't enough of a moralist to follow up the clue, how could I dare to harbour a feeling of love for you?"

The Lady Meningitis perceptibly softened.

"And you love me?" she said gently.

"Intensely!" cried the man, as he measured another hoof-print.

"That's nice of you," murmured the Lady. Then, "Have you nearly finished?" she asked.

"Nearly, beloved Lady. I have but three more to measure."

The Lady watched him with a curious air of abstraction as he resumed his work.

Baron Verdigris

When he had finished,

“Now, you will kiss me several times, if you don't mind,” she said.

“Mind?” he cried, with a vast amount of emphasis.

“Now, that is enough,” said the Lady finally.

“It can never be enough,” responded the man hotly.

“I quite agree with you—but I have something to tell you.”

She put him away from her with a quick movement of the hands.

“You know, if it had not been for my dear Verdigris, it might have been possible, even probable. An elopement with a valet offers distinct attractions to a maiden of my advanced views. Besides, you are on the spot.”

“I am, Lady mine,” he whispered insinuatingly. “Let us, O let us, fly.

Baron Verdigris

You give up the Baron, I give up the Clue, and thus we establish our love upon the sure basis of mutual sacrifice."

But the Lady Meningitis shook her head.

"No, it cannot be," she said. "It is true that you are here and that my Baron is there, but still I play for high stakes. He is transcendently beautiful."

"If it is only the little matter of a few murders, more or less," put in the man, "I can easily remedy that defect."

"Thou art a good man," responded the Lady, "a brave man, but it is of no avail. I love the Baron too deeply to allow thee to harbour any hope."

He grew pale and his lips worked convulsively; but soon his self-possession returned, and he said firmly:

"'Tis well, my Lady. A last favour at thy hands!"

Baron Verdigris

“Granted.”

“That I may become thine own most faithful servant, and be ever at hand to do thy bidding.”

“That, again, is very nice of you, and just what you ought to have done. I accept thy service.”

Right reverently the man kissed her hand, and swore allegiance to her.

At last she left him to return to her own chamber and continue waiting for word from her dear lord.

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY on the morning after the woodland feast and the agreement to start upon an informal crusade, the eight knights, in company with Peter the Hermit, proceeded on their way to the seaport and the good ship *Norman King*.

Baron Verdigris soon left them, however, and galloped on ahead, in order, as he explained to his companions, to ensure that the captain should have everything in readiness for instant departure. On reaching the harbour, he espied the ship lying at anchor some fifty yards out to sea ; and, digging his spurs deep into his horse's flanks, he put

Baron Verdigris

him to the jump, cleared the intervening space, and landed upon the decks of the *Norman King* with a crash that shook her from stem to stern.

“Skipper!” he cried, at the top of his voice.

“Yes, my liege,” responded the skipper, dropping gracefully down from a projecting spar.

“Seven goodly knights and a priest will presently arrive upon these decks. They are all innocent men and guileless withal. I cannot allow them to see this coal. Heave it overboard!”

“If so be that it is my liege’s pleasure, I hasten to accomplish this thing. And, of good truth, we shall need the space it occupieth at this moment.”

As they were throwing the coal overboard, however, the captain paused and looked at the Baron doubtfully.

Baron Verdigris

“Will the harbour authorities make things unpleasant for us?” he asked. “They may assert that we are blocking up the harbour.”

“I don’t think it likely,” responded the Baron carelessly. “You see, we can always kill them if they prove to be objectionable.”

“Quite true,” answered the skipper, as he proceeded with his work.

The vessel was no sooner emptied of its coal, and the anchor heaved, than Peter the Hermit and his companions appeared upon the quay. It had been arranged that all except the Baron Verdigris should leave their steeds behind, seeing that the accommodation of the *Norman King* was limited. The exception in favour of the Baron was made on account of the rare value of his horse and the improbability that he would ever

Baron Verdigris

again chance upon one so suited to his desires.

After all were aboard, a fresh breeze blew the *Norman King* merrily out to sea. Everything went well for the first part of the voyage, and it was not until they were but two days' sail from Alexandria, where they were minded to disembark, that a *contretemps* occurred.

One of the English knights, who was chatting gaily with Baron Verdigris near the stern of the vessel, chanced to glance in the direction of the helmsman. Something in the man's position struck him as unusual, and, letting his eyes wander from the man to the steering apparatus, he saw that the solid tiller which he had previously seen there had vanished, and that the man was turning from side to side a curious wheel, apparently fashioned of some kind of metal.

Baron Verdigris

The knight was so struck with this that he approached the helmsman.

“Ho, sirrah!” he cried, “what is this strange weapon that thou holdest in thy hand?”

By way of reply the man merely jerked the thumb of his disengaged hand in the direction of a large notice-board, on which was inscribed this mystic legend:—

“NO ONE MAY SPEAK TO THE MAN
AT THE WHEEL.”

The knight, not being able to read, was very naturally offended at the caitiff's sullen bearing, and was about to make a few well-directed physical remarks to him, when the Baron, whose face had grown clouded as with some strange trouble, took him by the arm and gently led him to the fore part of the ship.

Baron Verdigris

“I am sorry that this has happened,” he said. “I have done all I could to guard against such accidents.”

“But what meaneth it?” queried the knight.

The Baron’s voice fell to a low whisper.

“You will not let this go any farther?” he said.

“Of course not. Honour among th—knights.”

“Well, the fact is—quite between ourselves, you know—the fact is that It has not yet been invented.”

“So I should have thought,” said the knight, somewhat resentfully.

“Yes,” went on the Baron, “it comes later. As I say, I am sorry that this has happened, and will see that it does not occur again. I will go at once to the captain.”

Baron Verdigris

The knight was much mollified at the courteous tone of the Baron's explanation, and things ran quite smoothly once more after the latter had seen the captain and arranged for the immediate substitution of the old tiller for the more modern steering apparatus.

No further incident worthy of mention occurred until they reached Alexandria. When the *Norman King* had come safely to anchor in the harbour, Baron Verdigris summoned the captain and crew of the ship that had borne them all so faithfully and so speedily to their destination.

"Skipper and crew," he said impressively, "this voyage hath of good truth been pleasurable to all of us. Ye are trusty men and true, and it is my hope that we meet again in the near future.

Meanwhile, seeing that ye have been so faithful, and that so many passengers

Baron Verdigris

have unexpectedly come on board during this latter part of the journey, I give to the skipper my purse: half its contents shall go to himself and the other half to the men, to be divided equally. Are ye content?"

A great shouting from the sailors rent the air as the Baron concluded his speech, that testified to their being, indeed, content beyond measure; for the Baron's words had rung as true as they imagined that his gold would do.

Baron Verdigris flung, *almost carelessly* (see a former page), his purse to them, which clanked upon the knotted cordage with a melody all its own; after which he hurried the departure of his companions and himself from the ship with an anxiety that was only intelligible in the light of his next remark.

"Let us hasten!" he cried. "I am

Baron Verdigris

all athirst to press forward to the good work."

It may be mentioned that, after the passengers had left the ship and the skipper had with some difficulty contrived to open the purse of chain-work, this noble seafarer proved his disinterestedness by remarking to his men (his language being picturesquely and decently clothed in a volley of the choicest oaths) that, for his part, gold was not much to his mind, and they might share the whole amongst themselves.

I sometimes think that it is only these hard-swearing, bluff old sea-dogs who give any encouragement to our belief in the goodness of human nature.

Only why did Baron Verdigris smile that wide, much-meaning smile of his as he wended his way along the main street of Alexandria ?

Baron Verdigris

The goodly company tarried some few days in the city, in order that they might fully equip themselves for the perilous adventures on which they were bound. They experienced but little difficulty in providing themselves with steeds, as they adopted the simple and straightforward policy of claiming for their own any particularly fine piece of horse-flesh that they came across.

Finally all things were in readiness for the enterprise, and it was agreed that on the morrow they should fare forth from the city. That night, however, when the others were sleeping, the Knight Brandolo crept to where Baron Verdigris was wakefully watching the stars.

“Look here, Verdigris,” he said earnestly, “I’ve been giving a good deal of thought to the question, and I’ve honestly come to the conclusion that we

Baron Verdigris

shall weaken our position instead of strengthening it by this rash enterprise. In the first place, it may leak out that this Crusade has been undertaken, and I cannot see that it is honourable to falsify embryonic history: in the second place, we shall do more good by biding our time, and gradually increasing our strength to a hundredfold of what it is at present."

Baron Verdigris was a man of the world. That was why, at this juncture, he produced an elaborately chased cigarette case, selected one carefully (for there were two brands therein, one of which he kept exclusively for his friends), and slowly lit it.

"You won't mind?" he said, "I would not do it, except that it is artistically necessary for the present environment."

Then as an afterthought :

Baron Verdigris

“Do you care to smoke?” he asked, offering him the open case and carelessly covering the right-hand compartment with his hand.

“Well, perhaps I might allow myself to do so ; as you say, the circumstances make a virtue of it. Thanks.”

The two men were silent for just so long as was sufficient for an ash to form on the Baron's cigarette. Carelessly flicking this off with his little finger, “Of course, that means that there is a woman in the case,” he said, smiling cynically.

Brandolo was startled.

“Eh?” he responded. “I think the reverend Hermit was right—you seem to have a subtle inner vision of your own.”

“Yes, I am a man of the world,” answered the Baron complacently. “But

Baron Verdigris

that is not to the point. You must come with us to-morrow ; we need your assistance."

"I can't leave her !" exclaimed Brandolo desperately.

The Baron paused a little. Then,

"Brandolo, my friend," he said, "I am a thoroughly bad lot, but that does not deter me from acting as a lighthouse to warn ships from their impending doom."

"That's rather a fine simile, Verdigris. Wish I had made it myself."

"Ah ! not bad, perhaps," said the Baron. "But to return. What of the Lady Gora ?"

Brandolo started violently once more. Then he made all haste to be much moved.

"Thunderbolts of the Olympian !" he cried, "I had forgotten."

Baron Verdigris

He gripped his friend's hand hard.

"You have saved me from—from a variety of things," he said. "Of course, my love for the Lady Gora makes me forget everything else—it has even made me forget that I *did* love her."

"This is a minute psychological problem," the Baron remarked. "The hour is too late for its discussion. Thou comest with us?"

"Yea, with all zeal."

"'Tis well," said the Baron.

Simultaneously they threw away the cigarettes which they had just lit.

"And now," said the Baron, "since the environment no longer demands it, of course we must not smoke."

"Of course not," assented the Knight.

The scene closed with a kind of Strophe and Antistrophe, the Baron singing in his rich bass,

Baron Verdigris

“Art thou addressed
To the querulous quest?”

and the knight replying in a light tenor
of singularly pure quality,

“I *am* addressed
To the querulous quest.”

This duet was kept up for some half-hour, until Peter the Hermit was awakened, and, leaning on his elbow, uttered words ill-becoming the garb he wore ; but he explained in the morning that while sleeping a man wore, theoretically, no garb at all, and therefore was not responsible to the Clothed Ego of his waking hours.

On the morrow a hot sun glinted brightly upon the armour of the noble company that left the city by its Southern Gates, accompanied by the applause of

Baron Verdigris

the populace, and not a little weeping of susceptible women.

Their hearts were very light as they rode easily along, Peter taking the lead and singing lustily two verses of a song which he had improvised.

The savage and the cultured,
The living and sepultured,
Are equal blest
By this our quest.
To arms!

Eight noble knights and courtly,
Jerusalem full shortly
Will render free,
From sea to sea.
To arms!

Presently, however, they saw a large body of men some half-mile ahead of them, standing out dark against the background of the pale heavens.

Peter the Hermit ceased his song

Baron Verdigris

and rode his steed to the rear of the company.

“Now, of good truth, is the time come for you to work,” he said to his knights. “I lead the way with martial song until we approach the foe, and then you do the fighting. What more equable division of labour could there be?”

“What indeed?” cried the knights, with one voice.

Meanwhile they were rapidly approaching the host, and Baron Verdigris, who had been chosen as leader in all fights (solely on account of the noble character he had given himself—I have said that he was a man of the world), Baron Verdigris cried loudly, “Up, guards, and at ’em!”

In the excitement of the moment, he had forgotten his chronology once more,

Baron Verdigris

but fortunately no one noticed the fact. With a great shout the eight knights spurred on their steeds and clashed with the opposing Saracens, who numbered perhaps fourscore. (This is but a rough estimate, for at what period of History did a Saracen more or less count when Englishmen were their opponents?)

The fight was brief and bloody; which was exactly what the knights liked—the greatest amount of sanguinary excitement compressed into the shortest time.

In but few moments eighty (more or less, as I have said) Saracenic corpses lay upon the sunlit plain.

Baron Verdigris relieved himself of his helmet and gloves, and sank upon his knees amid the scene of carnage. Then, stooping, he bathed his glowing face in the streams of blood which ran on all

Baron Verdigris

sides of him ; and very pleasant was the touch of the warm fluid to the Baron, very pleasant the rich red that the sunlight shewed in the descending drops.

“Thou seemest happy, Baron,” said his comrade Brandolo.

“Yea, of good truth,” he answered; “the touch of this fair liquid remindeth me of the touch of the Lady Gore.”

The knight's face darkened, for the Baron's words had recalled to him the memory of his Lady Gora. There was little time for reflection, however, for Peter the Hermit bustled to the fore once more.

“No one wounded on our side?” he asked.

“Of course not. We are Englishmen,” responded the Baron, a little contemptuously.

“Ill boots it to be proud after so

Baron Verdigris

great a deliverance," quoth the godly man. "Rather shouldest thou be humble."

"Of course," responded the Baron, "if it pays better to be humble, that is another matter. I am a man of the world."

"Which world?" asked Peter innocently.

"The Western," answered the Baron proudly.

"And now," resumed the Hermit, after a pause, "must we push on and reach Suez before we halt our steeds again."

"Does Suez exist?" asked Baron Verdigris doubtfully.

Peter, fortunately enough, treated the rash query from his usual standpoint of orthodox innocence.

"Methinks Suez hath existence," he

Baron Verdigris

said. "I have heard no mention of its disappearance."

"'Tis well," said the Baron, as they prepared to start once more.

They reached Suez with little difficulty. The only foes whom they encountered on the way were in small bodies of forty and fifty, and their total annihilation was but child's play to the brave knights who were capable of so much greater things.

They rested within the town for one night, that their steeds might recover from the exertions of the previous day ; after which they set out once more, and in no long time were within sight of Jerusalem. A wild cheer burst from the company as the city came in view, its turrets and spires standing out bright in the rays of the afternoon sun.

When they were within some two

Baron Verdigris

miles of the object of their quest, a halt was called by Peter the Hermit, in order that they might discuss the best method of attack to be adopted.

“All the gates will be guarded,” said Peter, “because already several small assaults have been made upon the city by independent Crusaders, and the Saracens have become very watchful.”

“They must be killed before they can awaken their comrades within,” put in one of the knights.

“Yes, but how?” asked Peter perplexedly. “The Baron Verdigris hath a bow, but of the rest, not one possesseth any weapon with which he may shoot down noiselessly from afar.”

The Baron started and grew pale. He was fighting the baser man within himself, for a terrible temptation had come upon him. If, now, he were to

Baron Verdigris

supply his friends with the best air-guns, warranted to kill at five hundred yards, all would be easy, singularly easy.

For an instant Baron Verdigris wavered: then his strong sense of honour asserted itself.

“No!” he said to himself, “these Saracens *may* be gentlemen, in spite of being foreigners, and I will meet them upon fair and equal terms, as man to man.”

Virtue is often considerably more than its own reward; and in this instance the strength of Baron Verdigris in putting the evil thought away from him was rewarded by a suggestion that speedily occurred to him.

“Most antique Hermit,” quoth he, “I see that one of thy goodly knights hath an instrument of many strings, whereon he is wont to accompany himself to

Baron Verdigris

songs of roaming love. From love to war is a transition as easy as it is delightful."

"But," put in Peter, "I do not quite perceive the drift of thy remarks."

"It is quite simple. Cedar-wood is excellent for the formation of a bow, and I see many slender branches about me, such as will admirably answer our purpose. To these we fit the strings of the lute, and at once become armed in the manner we desire."

This idea met with universal approval, and ere long the whole of the knights were equipped with excellent bows, the arrows for which they also obtained from the more slender shoots of the cedars, fashioning them with the sharp edges of their swords.

"'Tis very well!" cried Peter the Hermit. "And now, comrades and

Baron Verdigris

fellow-fanatics, must we lie in concealment until night comes upon us. Then will we surround the walls at a distance of some hundred yards, shoot the sentries, and, collecting together, make a rapid charge through the streets of the unawakened city.”

The knights chafed somewhat under the necessity for temporary inaction that was forced upon them, but the time passed pleasantly enough with the kindly companionship of venison pasties and Sauterne ; so pleasantly that I fear one or two of the company were half loth to rouse themselves when the time for action came.

Everything was in their favour. The night was rather dark, but the temporary glimpses of the moon that shewed between the cloud-wrack flying overhead gave just sufficient light to the Crusaders

Baron Verdigris

to render visible the dark, gaunt forms of the Saracens who guarded the numerous gateways. It was fortunate, too, that all the gates of the city had recently proved obstinate for some reason or other (probably through a lack of sufficient oil), and that for some days they had sternly refused to allow themselves to be shut.

The sentries having been all shot through the heart, so skilfully that not a sound had disturbed the mighty quiet in which the city was wrapped, the company met, as pre-arranged, just without the principal gateway.

The signal was given, and they galloped *en masse* through the gate and along the main thoroughfare of Jerusalem.

“England expects every man ——” cried the Baron, by way of battle-cry.

“To do his duty!” was the thunderous shout that echoed from his followers and

Baron Verdigris

pierced every corner of the sleep-wrapped city.

The wretched Saracens began to turn out of their dwellings in twos and threes, only half awakened, and cursing volubly because their slumbers had been interrupted.

They did not curse long, however, for every man as he appeared was ruthlessly mown down by the valiant knights. At one point, indeed, the issue hung for a moment doubtful in the balance ; for when they reached one of the principal squares of the city, a large open space occupied by a number of flower-beds and a drinking fountain, they found that some ten hundred bearded Saracens, aroused by the sounds of tumult in the city, were standing, fully armed, waiting to see what the cause of the uproar might be.

Baron Verdigris

When they saw the advancing knights, a great cry, so terrible as to have struck terror to the hearts of the bravest, arose from their throats, and they formed one vast square in preparation to meet the cavalry charge.

The knights, nothing daunted, advanced at full gallop, broke up into companies of two as they neared the human square described in the city square, and thus made at their opponents from the four points of the compass.

How the battle might have fared—for the odds were fearful, more than a hundred to one—had it not been for the skilful tactics of Baron Verdigris, it would be hard to say. But, just as they were upon the foe, crouching with their spears up-pointed, the gallant Baron used a cry well known to his companions.

Baron Verdigris

“Ware wires!” he shouted in stentorian tones.

With one accord the knights set their straining steeds at the jump, and, with a bound, cleared the glittering wall of barbed spear-heads. The enemy being now within the square which, from without, was so redoubtable, many of the Saracens were crushed beneath the prancing horse-flesh above them; and with so good a will did the Crusaders wield their trusty swords, that in no long time there lay ten hundred corpses within that moonlit city square.

So great was the carnage that the ground beneath became saturated with blood, and the erstwhile limpid waters of the public drinking fountain, which proceeded from an underground spring, acquired a ruddy tinge that was singularly pleasant to behold.

Baron Verdigris

After this signal victory the conquest of Jerusalem was practically accomplished—all that was left to be done being a mere formal slaying of a few hundred more of the unhappy Saracens.

One man with whom the Baron came up, as they wandered through the city in search of straggling foes, fell upon his knees before him.

“Prince!” he cried tremulously, “drop your shooting-irons. I apologise.”

But the face of Baron Verdigris grew very stern.

“Accursed Directionalism!” he cried, as he plunged his sweating sword into the ruffian’s breast.

At last Jerusalem was conquered! A loud trumpet-peal rang through the city, and conveyed to Peter the Hermit, as well as to the whole of Christendom, the welcome intelligence.

Baron Verdigris

Peter himself, after he had made all necessary arrangements and had given his knights a few last words of encouragement and hope, had retired to a small grassy knoll that lay without the city : and he had here slumbered peacefully (for was he not a man of peace ?) until the issue was determined.

Awakened by the trumpet-peal, however, he sprang to his feet, mounted the horse that stood grazing quietly by its master's side, and galloped down the street of the city which his Crusaders had so hardly won.

“ Ye have done well, my sons ! ” was his simple and manly greeting as he came up with his companions.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was the afternoon of the day following the capture of Jerusalem, and Peter the Hermit was conversing with his Crusaders.

“You see,” he said, turning to the Baron, “you see, Verdigris, my son, we formed a club—the Crusaders’ Club, you know—with central premises in Piccadilly, and an establishment out here in Jerusalem.”

“How did you do that?” queried the Baron, “Jerusalem until now has been in the hands of the enemy.”

“Oh, we arranged all that from London. We wrote to the agents here.”

Baron Verdigris

The explanation did not seem at all clear to Baron Verdigris, but he had not had the luxury of dissembling for some time, and so availed himself of the present opportunity.

“Yea, reverend father, I perceive,” he said. “I prithee, proceed with thy narration.”

“Well,” went on the Hermit, “the Club’s finances got into difficulties. Of the *habitués* the most prominent were Robert of Normandy and William of Guienne ; and they both had expensive tastes. The other knights followed their example, and after a time it became one of the rules of the Club that no champagne was to be drunk on the premises of a date later than 1000. Add to this the balls and suppers that were of frequent occurrence (I do not blame them for this innocent merry-making : I only

Baron Verdigris

do hold the Crusaders' Club," the knights made great acclaim. Their course of action was perfectly clear to them.

"Follow me!" cried the Baron. And the whole cavalcade dashed off to the Club premises.

The Baron flung himself from his horse and boldly entered the imposing portals of the gilded edifice, closely followed by his comrades.

Within stood a tall, stalwart man in a braided uniform.

"I can't let you pass, sir. My orders, sir——" he said, laying his hand on the Baron's arm.

Baron Verdigris took only such notice of the man as was necessary to outstretch him upon the tessellated pavement, and passed on within the building. Here he found the whole of the commodious premises filled to overflowing with Jews

Baron Verdigris

“of all ages and sexes.” The Baron frowned: for he knew intuitively that a rule of the Club was that no ladies were to be admitted—otherwise, how could the members derive any pleasure from their introduction?

As he entered the smoking-room, a venerable-looking man, with flowing hair and a long grey beard, approached him.

“Pardon me, sir,” he said, “but is not this an unwarrantable intrusion?”

“On the part of your countrymen?” responded the Baron quickly. “Yes, a perfectly unwarrantable intrusion. This is the Crusaders’ Club, and we are Crusaders; hence, by a most elementary application of logic, the Club belongs to us.”

The Jew scowled, and an unpleasant sneer shewed itself upon the lines about

Baron Verdigris

his mouth and the interlacing crow's-feet round his cruel eyes.

"The scrip is ours," he said vindictively.

"And," responded Baron Verdigris, with an airiness of manner that shewed how thoroughly he knew that he held the stronger position, "and the sword is ours. The sword, my hirsute friend, is not infrequently stronger than the pen."

Then he turned to his knights.

"I know that your arms are yet weary from the fight of yesterday," he said, "but I must ask you to kill these people. It will not take long."

Then right lustily did the knights make play with their swords. In vain the wretched Hebrews shrieked for mercy.

"Nay," quoth the Baron, "the Saracens were but heathens and we slew

Baron Verdigris

them. Ye are worse—ye are educated savages ; think ye then that ye shall live?”

* * * * *

A week after these events, Baron Verdigris sat within the drawing-room of the Crusaders' Club. His brows were bent, and a look of gloomy despondency was on his face. It was just the old story. So long as his hands and brains were occupied, he had not had leisure for introspection : but during the past week the comfortable indolence which he had enjoyed had proved only too favourable to the morbid activity of self-analysis.

Several problems pressed upon him just now for solution. There was the question of Lady Meningitis and the powdered glass ; and it was this which occupied his thoughts at the moment.

Baron Verdigris

“I had to slay the Lady,” he mused. “Posterity demanded it. I have not slain her, because I used a poison that had not been invented. How far was I morally responsible? I say boldly to myself that I used the poison in good faith; but a hideous undercurrent in my conscience *will* suggest that I was not quite honest, that I temporized, that I endeavoured at once to satisfy the proprieties and yet gratify my liking for the Lady Meningitis.—As though,” he broke off, smiling cynically, “as though the proprieties and a liking for a lady were ever reconcilable!”

“Is it more than liking?” he went on. “Do I love the Lady Meningitis? No, no, no! It is weakness, folly. I will not give another thought to her!”

The emphasis, the marked italicism, of the Baron’s last remarks boded well, if

Baron Verdigris

she could but have known it, for the hopes of the fair Lady Meningitis. The Baron, however, thought that he really meant what he said, and proceeded at once to act upon his resolve.

He summoned a man dressed in the long robe and cowl of a Cistercian monk, who was seated at a side desk, writing.

“Good scribner,” he began.

“Pardon, my liege, but I am not the magazine.”

The Baron laughed heartily at this sally.

“Ha, ha!” he cried, “you monks were ever merry. But a truce to jesting. Good scrivener, I prithee write for me these words.”

The monk took a fresh sheet of note-paper and a new quill, and commenced writing to the Baron’s dictation.

“Fair Lady,” the letter ran, “I will

Baron Veraigris

make my answer to thy message as brief as it is unpleasant. *I cannot love.*

(Signed), BOLDANDBAD, BARON VERDIGRIS."

This written, the Baron affixed a cross, to testify to the genuineness of his signature, and the monk sealed the letter with a wafer. But even while he was thus in the act of giving effect to his resolve, the underlying weakness of his purpose betrayed itself.

"Scrivener!" he cried, "art thou sure that thou didst use the Club paper, with the address stamped at the top thereof?"

"Yea, my liege," answered the monk. "I used the best cream-laid note, with the superscription stamped in red."

"'Tis well," said the Baron. Then to himself, "Stamped in *red*. Ha, ha, the Lady Gore, forsooth! 'Tis very fitting."

Baron Verdigris

Then he summoned the porter.

“See, sirrah,” he said, pointing to the letter, “this must reach England full speedily. Within what period canst thou ensure its delivery?”

The man thought a little.

“Within the week,” he said at last. “I will send a special messenger with it, who shall travel night and day by the fastest ships and the speediest trains —”

But the Baron’s hand was placed roughly over his mouth before he could say more.

“Hush!” whispered he, pointing to the scrivener, who *appeared* to be intent on his writing, “do as thou sayest, but let not the monk hear such words from thee.”

CHAPTER VIII.

IT will be remembered that there were ladies present when the wholesale massacre of the Jews occurred at the Crusaders' Club; and it will no doubt be matter of question whether they were included in the general slaughter or not. But this question need scarcely have been raised, had it been recollected that the Crusaders were knights and, as such, pledged to save feminine life upon all occasions.

Of course, along with their chivalrous desire to spare the ladies at the Club, there was mingled a certain sense of appreciation of the charms which many of them undoubtedly possessed. All motives are

Baron Verdigris

mixed in their composition : otherwise there would be no excitement in life.

And so it chanced that, when the short combat was almost over, Brandolo, who had penetrated unaccompanied as far as the secretary's private room, there found not only that official himself, but also a lady, of surpassing beauty and grace.

As his eyes fell upon her, a strange feeling, half of remembrance, wholly of joy, passed over him.

"Who can this lady be? I seem to have known her, somewhen, somehow, somewhere," he muttered, as he absent-mindedly accomplished the work of slaying the secretary.

As the man fell from his chair, the lady gave a great cry and swooned upon his prostrate form.

Directly he heard the voice, the Knight

Baron Verdigris

Brandolo knew the reason of his strange feeling. The Lady Gora had always been of a sensitive and highly-pitched disposition, and the sweet note of her scream was more familiar to him than any included in the musical *répertoire* of her voice.

“My Lady Gora!” he cried wildly, mad with joy, as he lifted her recumbent form.

She opened her eyes slowly, gave a little start as she in turn recognised the features of her knight, and then cast her arms passionately about his neck.

“Brandolo!” she murmured, as her head sank upon the metallic brightness of his breastplate.

Suddenly, with an exclamation, he put her away from him.

“Lady Gora, thou art false!” he cried.

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A look of terror came into her face.

“What wast thou doing here, alone with this caitiff? And why didst thou fall thus wildly upon his corpse? Answer me!”

The look of terror deepened, and the Lady trembled violently.

“I—I did but come hither,” she stammered, after a pause, “to—to learn somewhat of thy whereabouts.”

“It will not do, Lady Gora,” responded Brandolo, with an expression of fine contempt upon his tight-closed lips. “It will not do. How didst thou know I was a crusader? ’Twas but by chance that I happened upon my companions.”

The Lady Gora was brought to bay. She ceased trembling and stood up before him, her nails buried to the hilt in her delicate hands. Her fear of the

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knight's wrath was lost in the rage which filled her because she had lied amiss.

"To lie," she cried to herself, "is excellent, but to lie badly—that is unpardonable."

Then aloud,

"My knight," she said, "I will confess all. Wearied by too long waiting for thy coming, I thought to pass the time by indulging in a little intrigue."

Brandolo was evidently softened by her words. Seeing her advantage, she went on :

"Dost think, Brandolo, that it would have shewn great love for thee if I had been content to wait idly for thy coming?"

"Well, no," responded Brandolo. "If I was sure that in good truth this were no more than a lightsome intrigue, then should I be well content.

Baron Verdigris

But I fear me that thou dost love this man."

"Sir Brandolo, thou wrongest me!" she said, looking into his eyes.

"I'm very glad," he answered quickly, taking her hands in his.

"Glad that thou hast wronged me?" she queried, with a pretty affectation of coquetry.

So he kissed her many times, and they sat together in the room until long after the daylight had faded, talking of Brandolo's quest and of the Lady Gora's waiting.

After this meeting things went very well with the two lovers, until one day Baron Verdigris, soon after he had despatched his missive to the Lady Meningitis, chanced to be riding thoughtfully down one of the side streets of Jerusalem; when a lady, mounted upon

Baron Verdigris

a gaily caparisoned palfrey, appeared round a corner of the road and advanced to meet him.

As she passed, she hurled several extremely passionate glances broadcast at the Baron. He, on his part, gracefully kissed his hand to her and soon afterwards, having turned his steed, cantered up to the side of her palfrey.

From these little attentions upon the part of Baron Verdigris, it will be gathered that he was far from being the man he once was. In point of fact, the mental worry which had oppressed him of late, in connection both with the Positive Direction and with the question of the powdered glass, had operated to render the Baron softer in disposition and more susceptible to feminine attractions than he had been erstwhile. The worst symptom of his case in the present

Baron Verdigris

instance was a vague longing for something of the nature of a stringed instrument, whereon he might accompany himself to a song of love.

The Lady Gora appeared to be much pleased with the behaviour of the noble Baron, and smiled sweetly upon him as he came alongside.

“Most fair Lady,” quoth Baron Verdigris, “may I, temporarily at least, be thy knight?”

“Yea, noble knight, I grant thee thy request,” she said graciously, and leaning voluptuously over her saddle.

“I thank thee, Lady : of good sooth I feel that thou hast not chosen amiss, for I am hight the Baron Verdigris.”

“And I the Lady Gora.”

“The what?” ejaculated the Baron. — “Oh, I beg your pardon,” he went on, lapsing into the modern phraseology, as

Baron Verdigris

he usually did when under the influence of strong excitement: "I beg your pardon. But I know the Knight Brandolo, and your sister was an old love of mine."

From the last observation, it will be seen how thoroughly marked was the change in Baron Verdigris. A month ago he despised the very thought of love, and now he was making all haste to invent past *amours*, in order that he might shine in the eyes of the Lady Gora.

"Then Brandolo is thy comrade?" she asked innocently. In reality, it was from Brandolo that she had first heard of the prowess and fair fame of Baron Verdigris, and how he had never yet yielded to the voice of love; and she had resolved that his record in this last particular should not long remain unbroken. Accordingly, she had haunted the by-ways of Jerusalem for several

Baron Verdigris

days past, with the purpose of meeting the Baron.

The latter answered her question in the affirmative, and she held up her forefinger with an indescribable air of witchery and archness.

“ Yet, knowing that I am his Lady, thou hast proved false to thy friend. Baron, it fears me thou art very, very wicked ! ”

“ Well, do you know, ” said the Baron, complacently caressing the heavy folds of his moustache, “ do you know, Lady Gora, I rather flatter myself that I am. ”

“ Yes, thou bad, bad man ; thou wilt prove untrue to me also, if thou canst not remain faithful to thy friend. ”

“ Never, dear Lady ! ” he exclaimed, kissing her between each syllable. “ I am always individualistically unconven-

Baron Verdigris

tional. I never do as the others do. Now, faithfulness to one's brother-knights is a common virtue, and so is infidelity to one's Lady. Hence, by proving false to Brandolo and true to you, I am consistently vicious."

"Ah, Baron," she said, throwing herself lightly from her saddle into his arms, "thy logic is as convincing as thy presence—and that, of good truth, is praise indeed."

"Good of you to say so," murmured the Baron, much gratified by her delicate compliment.

As they were returning from the long ride which followed this interchange of courtesies, they chanced by ill-luck to meet the Knight Brandolo. As usual, the Lady Gora screamed. Brandolo, seeing them advance to meet him, fast-locked in each other's arms, cried loudly,

Baron Verdigris

“Have at thee, traitor!” and galloped full tilt against the Baron.

The latter, quick as thought, gently threw the fair form of the Lady Gora upon her own palfrey, which was prancing merrily beside them, drew down his vizor, which he had naturally been obliged to lift in order to enact the love-scene, and spurred on Morcaput, his trusty steed, to the combat.

They shocked together, and straightway Brandolo was lying upon the sward.

“It was inevitable, for am I not Verdigris?” said the Baron, as he stooped above the body of his fallen foe. “Shall I spare thy life, good knight,—good even though thou hast called me traitor?”

“Yea, Baron; thy courtesy hath won me. I draw back the word I spoke, and

Baron Verdigris

accept my life at thy hands. The Lady, of course, is thine."

"'Tis well," quoth Baron Verdigris loftily.

"I am not quite sure that it is well," said the Lady Gora, somewhat resentfully, as she slipped from off her saddle.

Then turning to Brandolo,

"Erstwhile knight of mine, now unhorsed by the lance of the noble Baron Verdigris, full lightly dost thou yield me to thy conqueror."

The fallen knight looked at her.

"As for me," said he, "necessity constrains; but full lightly, and that without cause, didst thou exchange my love for that of the Baron Verdigris."

"For that had I *good* cause, Brandolo," the Lady made reply. "I told thee, when thou didst find me here within the

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city, that I had waited long for thee. I mistook the object of my waiting, that is all. When I saw the Baron Verdigris, full speedily I knew that he was the lover for whom I had yearned. I grieve for thee, Brandolo."

"Oh, I don't think you need trouble to do that, Lady Gora," he said, as he remounted his steed. "I *may* possibly survive it," were his last words as he set spurs to his steed and galloped rapidly away.

The subtle sarcasm of the tone in which the knight had uttered this expression of his sentiments cut the Lady Gora to the heart. It was not particularly flattering to her vanity; neither did she like to lose so favourable an opportunity of playing at Platonics with her discarded lover, especially when she felt so capable of enacting the *rôle*.

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Her disgust was not lessened by the fact that the words of an exceedingly light-hearted and frivolous love-song came floating down the breeze to her from the lips of the fast-vanishing knight.

The cause of Brandolo's evident carelessness involves far too much explanation to be dwelt upon here ; which is a pity, because a full account of it would afford a very interesting and instructive example of the Labyrinthic Intrigue. Its general nature, however, may be briefly hinted at.

Brandolo, some three years before the events of this chapter, had in a rash moment, carried away by the scent of the flowers with which Malta is so richly carpeted, made hot love to the beautiful Lady Gora, and she had granted him the privilege of being her knight, for which he had pleaded so earnestly.

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Within a few months, however, of making his vows to this Lady, it chanced that he met one day, within a lonely forest through which he was riding, a belated damsel, of extraordinary beauty and of lofty lineage. To this maiden he made love more warmly than to the Lady Gora in proportion as his passion was infinitely stronger and more lasting.

She, however, was devoted to another knight, who, in his turn, was plighted to a lady on the island of Sicily.

Consequently, Brandolo returned, distractedly, to the Lady Gora, and in no long time persuaded himself that he really loved her better than all beside. Not long after this he met another maid, the Lady Mora, and at once fell a victim to her charms, because the initial "M" of her name was so much prettier to his ears than the "G" of the Lady Gora.

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Misfortune still pursued him, however, for the Lady Mora was passionately attached to a knight who at that period was making love to Lady Gora herself.

In addition to these complications, there was a considerable number of less prominent disturbing influences, such as an uncle of Brandolo's who desired to marry the Lady Gora, and a great-grandfather of the Lady Gora whose sole hope in life was to make the Lady Mora his ; but we cannot go into these minor details without unduly increasing the length of this narrative.

Brandolo himself had emerged from this system of complicated interests and warring passions with singularly little damage to either his head or his heart. It will be remembered that this knight had confided to Baron Verdigris, while

Baron Verdigris

they were yet in Alexandria, his doubts as to the success of the expedition, and that the Baron had shrewdly guessed the cause to be a feminine one. That guess was, in point of fact, quite correct, and the lady in the case, overcome by love for Brandolo and by grief at his departure, had followed him to Jerusalem.

Two days before the encounter with Baron Verdigris which has just been described, Brandolo had met her as she entered the principal gates of the city, and she had cast herself so fervently into his arms that he knew at once that she alone was the maiden for whom he really cared. Hence the interview with the Baron and the Lady Gora was only a well-acted piece of theatrical display, which he had gone through from a sense of duty towards *les convenances*.

After his departure, the Lady Gora

Baron Verdigris

and her companion wended their way homewards; but they did not part before an arrangement had been made to meet on the following day.

It was with an exceedingly light heart that Baron Verdigris entered the door of the Crusaders' Club that afternoon. He had not felt so happy for many years; as, indeed, he had good reason to do. For was he not experiencing the delights of his first love-affair? Added to this was a vague feeling that he was acting towards the Lady Meningitis with a beautiful cruelty; so that the measure of the Baron's joy and self-approbation was full to the brim.

That same night, however, as he sat, wrapped in contemplation and a dressing-gown, within his chamber, he half unconsciously let his thoughts wander along the Positive Direction. Presently he

Baron Verdigris

reached the end of the Nineteenth Century and found himself within the English House of Lords.

Some few noble members were strewn in picturesquely comfortable attitudes about the benches, and were waiting, with an air of boredom and lassitude, until the gentleman who was at the moment in possession of the House should have concluded his remarks. The latter, judging from his appearance of nervousness, was as anxious as any of his hearers to bring his speech to a close, but could not summon up courage to resume his seat; and so he proceeded desperately with his interjectory commonplaces.

The Baron turned to a superb creature who chanced to be seated next to him.

“Pardon my addressing you, sir,” he said, “but can you inform me as to the

Baron Verdigris

name of the particular noble lord who is at this moment upon his legs?"

"Aw, yath," responded the questioned one, "he ith Bawon Vewdigwith. He'th making hith maiden thpeech, don't you know."

"The deuce he is!" interjected the Baron excitedly.

"Yath," said the stranger listlessly. "He'th quite a jawly old chappie to know, but he'th not bwilliant at thith kind of thing, don't you know."

"Your perceptions are acute," muttered the Baron sarcastically.

"Ah, yath! I wath born that way, you thee."

The Baron was exceedingly angry and ashamed, and hurried off to find a "Burke's Peerage," to see whether, in sober fact, this "jawly old chappie" was the descendant of his line. Yes, there

Baron Verdigris

was no mistaking it: the "Peerage" stated unequivocally that there was in existence a Twenty-first Baron Verdigris, and there was no reason for crediting his first informant with a capacity for lying.

The Baron Verdigris re-entered the Debating Hall just as his descendant concluded his speech, and he immediately took possession of the House. His words were brief and to the point.

"Shades of my ancestors!" he exclaimed, "and this is posterity!"

"I rise to a point of order!" said an elderly gentleman with white hair and a dignified deportment. "The noble lord is in error in describing us as Posterity; they come later."

"If," retorted the Baron, with some warmth, "if the remark of the noble lord who has just interrupted me were a little less fatuous and idiotic——"

Baron Verdigris

“Withdraw, withdraw!” was the cry that rang through the House.

“With pleasure,” said the Baron. “No inducement could be sufficiently powerful to detain one within these precincts. But before I withdraw, let me remark that you all come later—which is singularly fortunate for the Eleventh Century.”

The mysterious import of the Baron’s words struck the august assembly speechless, and it was in the midst of a dead silence that he clanked irately from out the chamber.

“This is horrible!” cried Baron Verdigris to himself, as he returned to the Present. “To think that one should come to that!”

A look of settled gloom was on his face, as he sat there pondering deeply.

“No, it will not do,” he said at last.

Baron Verdigris

“I must give up the Lady Gora. I shall never marry now—for how can I allow myself to have descendants at all, knowing so well of what kind are to be the future bearers of my name ? ”

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning Baron Verdigris set out to the trysting-place, fully resolved that he would acquaint the Lady Gora with the determination at which he had arrived on the preceding evening.

But when he found himself actually in her company and began to be permeated once more with the delicacy of her attentions, he found it by no means easy to put his resolve into execution ; and it was not until they had almost reached home again that he summoned all his courage to his aid, and addressed his Lady upon the subject.

“Lady Gora,” he said, his tightly-

Baron Verdigris

clenched lips witnessing to the combat between duty and desire that was being waged within him, "Lady Gora, I can never marry you!"

The Lady Gora turned to him.

"Why not?" she asked doubtfully. "Dost thou love another?"

"No," replied the Baron, "it is not that. But I refuse to lend myself to the production of posterity."

Then he told her what he had seen and heard within the Nineteenth-Century House of Lords.

"Methinks," said the Lady Gora, when he had finished, "that this is but a light cause for so weighty a resolve as thine. What hast thou to do with Posterity?"

But the Baron was firm. He resisted even the humid intensity of her eyes.

"No, Lady Gora, I shall never marry," he said simply.

Baron Verdigris

A rippling laugh escaped the milk-white barrier of his companion's teeth, as she laid her hand on his arm.

"After all, my Baron, doth it matter much?" she said archly.

"Ah, well!" replied Baron Verdigris, "of course if you recognise that we are simply frivolling, and that my attentions are not serious, there is no reason whatever why we should not meet."

"None whatever," repeated the Lady Gora softly.

At this juncture they espied Peter the Hermit riding slowly along, apparently in search of some one. When he saw the Baron he put spurs to his horse.

"Ah, there you are, Verdigris! I was in search of you," he cried, all breathless from his exertions (for Peter was wont to travel no faster than at a walking-pace).

Baron Verdigris

Then, seeing the Lady Gora, he doffed his cowl to her.

“I am sorry to disturb what is doubtless a very pleasant interview,” he said, smiling in a benign and fatherly manner, “but the fact is that these Saracen ruffians are becoming too much emboldened, and already they press over close around the city. We must make a sally.”

“You are not going to allow my Verdigris to be wounded, perhaps slain, worthy father?” said the Lady Gora disconsolately.

“No, my dear,” responded the Hermit in a kindly tone, “the Baron Verdigris is never hurt upon these occasions.”

“Never,” echoed the Baron, fondling the hand of his Lady, and striving to quell her rising fears.

Then, “Are the others ready for the fight?” he asked the monk.

Baron Verdigris

“Yea, my son. They do but await their leader.”

“Ha! ’tis very well,” said the Baron, his old love for the Lady Gora asserting itself.

Having bidden his Lady a brief, but tender, farewell, he left her under the care of Peter the Hermit and made for the Crusaders’ Club with all speed.

Arrived there, he found his brother-knights waiting without the entrance, fully armed, and restraining with difficulty their ardour and their champing steeds.

“To the sortie!” cried the Baron.

And “To the sortie!” responded the glittering cavalcade, as they followed the Baron.

Outside the city they found a dense throng of Saracens, who were collected in a number of groups around temporary platforms that had been erected through-

Baron Verdigris

out the plain. From these platforms proceeded the fervid utterances of orators, who were endeavouring to persuade their brethren to assail the city forthwith.

When the trumpet-call of the advancing Crusaders fell upon the ears of this mighty concourse, they made all haste to draw their swords and, in their turn, raised their battle-cry. The erstwhile orators quietly slipped beneath the loose boards of their platforms, and the fight commenced.

In no long time the knights were separated one from the other, and each engaged single-handed some hundreds of the foe. For some two hours the slaughter proceeded right merrily, and the Saracens fell thick as late woodland leaves beneath the gusts of November.

Baron Verdigris had accounted for

Baron Verdigris

a hundred and seventy-three of his adversaries, when his trusty sword, which he had carried undinted through innumerable previous battles, suddenly snapped with the force of a blow he aimed at a tall, ill-favoured pagan who confronted him. He had long since alighted from Morcaput, for whom there was all too little room among the crowding foe, and along with his steed he had also abandoned his lance ; so that now he found himself weaponless.

His first thought was to snatch a sword from one of the enemy, but an instant's reflection shewed him how unworthy was such a weapon to grace his noble hand, and he resolved to leave the field.

“After all,” he muttered, as he turned to go, “I am getting horribly bored by the mere physical exertion of slaying

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these caitiffs. I shall not be sorry to rest awhile."

Then he went from the field, striking out contemptuously with his heels, as if he had been skating backwards, and killing outright many of the enemy with his red-dripping spurs.

As he reached the city gate, he looked up and saw upon the walls Peter the Hermit and the Lady Gora, who had witnessed the changing issues of the fight, and who loudly applauded the noble Baron as he returned within the city.

By this time the Saracens were in full flight; half their number lay dead upon the field, and the seven knights, as yet unwounded, still plied unwearied their glittering blades. So their leader had sounded the cry of retreat: "Tisna Ghoodenuff!" and with one accord the

Baron Verdigris

pagan host had turned and sped swiftly away, trampling down their comrades in their frenzied efforts to escape.

But, as is so often the case, it was just in the hour of victory that disaster fell upon Baron Verdigris. For, shortly after he had re-entered the city, and had removed his armour for the sake of coolness and his helmet for the purpose of holding sweet love-parley with the Lady Gora, a spent arrow, vaulting the barrier of the city walls, pierced the right lung of the Baron and stuck there, its feathered head quivering dolorously, as if it had been a thing of life.

The Lady Gora swooned.

Peter the Hermit appealed to his vocabulary.

Thus the knights, returning flushed from their victory, felt a cold chill seize upon them, as when some hardy mortal

Baron Verdigris

dives through the broken ice into the chilly waters of a winter morning. For, expecting to enjoy a well-earned repose amid peaceful surroundings, they found their Chieftain lying in agony upon the ground, his beauteous Lady in a like recumbent position, and the reverend Hermit, whom they had always regarded as immaculate, using language which jarred painfully upon their overstrained susceptibilities.

The result of this chill, coming so suddenly after the heat of the protracted fight, was that they all, with the exception of the hardy Brandolo, were at once seized with aggravated forms of pneumonia, and took their places by the Baron's side upon the pavement.

Brandolo leant over the prostrate form of Baron Verdigris, and heard him whisper, in the intervals between the

Baron Verdigris

pain-spasms that wrung him through and through:—

“Comrade — the arrow—is—barbed. Push it—through—you cannot—.” A long pause and numerous gasps. “You cannot pull — it — out,” he concluded, spent with the effort to make himself intelligible.

Brandolo’s eyes were wet as he forced himself to do the bidding of his friend. It was terrible to have to cause so much anguish, but he saw that it was the only chance of saving the Baron’s life; so with a firm hand he laid hold of the arrow and slowly forced it through the body of its victim.

He was afraid that he might strike the backbone with the point, in which case all hope of pushing it further outward would be at an end: fortunately, however, the end protruded some

Baron Verdigris

few inches to the left of the vertebral column, and in no long time the missile lay in its entirety within Brandolo's hand.

"Have I pained thee much, my friend?" queried the knight compassionately, as his friend lay back a stifled groan escaping his bloodless lips.

"Oh no!" responded Baron Verdigris, with a painful effort to smile, "I have enjoyed it. A new emotion, you know, is always acceptable."

He had hardly finished before he fell back in a dead faint.

Meanwhile the Lady Gora had returned to consciousness and tears, and sat by the Baron's side, sorrowfully watching the doubtful issue of life and death within his wounded frame.

It was a sad procession that slowly

Baron Verdigris

wended its way along the streets of Jerusalem that afternoon. At its head was borne the Baron Verdigris, upon a litter of gold inwrought with gems and precious stones ; on one side of him walked the Lady Gora, on the other Brandolo and Peter the Hermit ; while behind there followed six ambulance waggons, bearing the bodies of the pneumonic knights.

The intention of the bearers was to convey the sick men to the public hospital of Jerusalem, there to obtain the most skilful treatment known to the science of that day ; but as they passed a certain pretty little edifice on their way thither, the Lady Gora stopped.

“This is my abode,” she said to the *littérateurs* of Baron Verdigris. “The Baron shall be tended here by my own fair hands.”

Baron Verdigris

So they bore him gently up the stairs and into the Lady's own room, while Peter and Brandolo went on to the hospital with their other comrades.

CHAPTER X.

IT was now seven days since the Baron had been stricken by the all too-barbèd arrow.

Within the Lady Gora's chamber a single rushlight shed its fitful brilliance through the gloom ; for it was long past nightfall.

Baron Verdigris was in a raging delirium. He babbled inconsequently of powdered glass and the Positive Direction, of the Lady Meningitis and the Lady Gora.

The constant repetition of another woman's name by the man whom she so loved had cut the Lady Gora to the heart, but she was much comforted when,

Baron Verdigris

after some days, she gathered from the Baron's own lips that he had murdered this antecedent rival of hers ; although certain mysterious references to a poison that had not yet been invented occasioned her a good deal of mental worry and emotional anxiety.

She had strong theories, this talented lady, as to the proper modes of treatment in cases of sickness, and had firmly refused to call in outside assistance in the present instance. Knowing as she did how different from other men was the Baron, both in constitution and in habits, she had at the very first determined upon an original and extremely daring means of bringing him back to health and strength.

The key-note of her system can be explained in one word — BRANDY. Solely by aid of this generous fluid,

Baron Verdigris

administered in as large quantities as he could possibly swallow, she trusted to grapple with the evils attendant upon a pierced lung; and her faith in her own judgment had justified itself. For, though the Baron was still subject to periods of delirium, in one of which we found him at the commencement of this chapter, yet the intervals between the occurrence of these attacks, and the period of their duration, had been growing respectively longer and shorter.

Within the week Baron Verdigris had consumed eleven gallons of the healing spirit, and it was just as the Lady Gora was opening a fresh cask, on the evening of which our story is at present treating, that his short period of mental aberration was drawing to a close.

“Am I guilty?” he was saying for

Baron Verdigris

the twentieth time. "Powdered glass was not invented."

"Now, my Baron," said the Lady Gora, in her soothing, womanly manner, "do not let these things worry you. Everything that is in existence has been invented, so of course you poisoned her."

The sound of the Lady Gora's voice turned the Baron's wanderings into a fresh channel of perplexity.

"Oh!" he cried, half rising in his distraction from the couch upon which he lay, "Oh, that awful person who called himself Twenty-first Baron Verdigris!" The 'jawly chappy,' my Lady Gora!—I can never marry."

She placed her hands upon his fevered brow and gently laid him back upon the couch once more. Presently he sank into a deep, unbroken slumber, and the Lady watched him with a smile upon her lips.

Baron Verdigris

As she sat there, she commenced to sing a low, crooning lullaby, which served to further soothe the Baron's slumbers.

Baron, Baron, love of mine,
All too weak was strongest wine ;
Only brandy had the strength
To revive thy drooping length.

As the spirit mounted high,
Brighter, brighter grew thine eye :
It hath saved thee, perfect balm,
Thou art healèd by its charm.

She was just beginning the third verse when the door of the chamber opened noiselessly, and a woman entered the room. She was tall and indescribably graceful, and she was attired in the contrasting black and white of a hospital nurse.

The Lady Gora looked up quickly, startled by the very noiselessness of her entry.

Baron Verdigris

"Who art thou?" she asked.

"I am the Lady Meningitis," the stranger responded superciliously.

"That, I fear, is quite impossible," retorted the Lady Gora; "you were poisoned some time ago."

"That fact scarcely affects the question," said the new-comer. "It was nothing more than a matter of form."

"I see," replied the Lady Gora. "That accounts for the lack of ceremony with which you entered."

"Possibly," said the Lady Meningitis; "but I cannot waste time upon the discussion of such a trifling point. I shall be glad if you will at once leave this chamber for ever, and abandon Baron Verdigris to my care."

"Suppose I refuse?" murmured the Lady Gora resentfully.

"You have no option, fortunately

Baron Verdigris

enough. You see, I am a trained nurse, and you are absolutely without experience of medical cases."

Her words produced a marked effect upon her rival. As a matter of fact, it was only in attire that the Lady Meningitis was a trained nurse; and it would form an interesting study in the practical value of the outer dress, if we had time to spare for the question, to make a qualitative analysis of the feelings of the Lady Gora. That lady accepted the stranger's statement as strictly accurate, and realised that there was, indeed, no course open to her but to retire with all possible speed.

This speed was accelerated by the fact that Baron Verdigris awoke at that moment, looked in the direction of the two ladies, and at once extended his arms with the cry:

Baron Verdigris

“ My Lady Meningitis ! ”

After this expression of his preference for her hated rival, the Lady Gora stayed only just long enough to deliver herself of the last word.

“ For one thing at least,” she cried, with bitter emphasis, “ I am glad beyond measure. Thanks to the rational treatment which the Baron has undergone at my hands, his recovery is too certain to be affected *even* by the presence of a trained nurse.”

Outside she came upon Brandolo.

“ I knew you would come,” he said, as he took possession of her lips.

Through everything the knight had come back to his old love. She had always been the only possible love: he knew that now.

“ Yes,” she answered apathetically.

Baron Verdigris

“If you care to take me, I promise to make you a bad wife.”

“What more could one desire?” said Brandolo rapturously.

Within the chamber the head of Baron Verdigris lay peacefully upon the lap of his late-recovered Lady.

CHAPTER XI.

THIS Romance draws to a close, as every good thing must, ultimately.

But few words will suffice to lead the reader gently through the remaining events of the Crusaders' stay in Jerusalem, down to the shores of the blue Mediterranean and the homeward journey.

Within a week after the arrival of the Lady Meningitis, the Baron was convalescent, and his devoted nurse allowed him to sit up for a few hours every day. It was on one of these afternoons, as he reposed contentedly on a large invalid-couch drawn up before the sunlit window, that his Lady deemed him

Baron Verdigris

sufficiently strong to hear the story of her adventures.

She had received his cruelly brief message, and was so overcome by its trenchant hopelessness that at first she had resolved upon seeking Instant Death. On enquiry, however, at the Post Office, she learned that there had been a gentleman of that name at one time to be found on the pages of the official directory, but that he had left his abode rather hurriedly some few years previously for foreign parts and had not been heard of since.

In vain she had argued with the clerk—the same impressionable swain who had once offered up fivepence at the altar of her beauty—that an abode constituted an address, and that if Instant Death had left his abode it followed, as a matter of course, that he had also left his address.

Baron Verdigris

The clerk had quite admitted the justice of her remarks, but said that he could not exceed his instructions; and the Lady Meningitis had departed in great sorrow and perplexity.

Then it had occurred to her, in a flash of inspiration, that all true women under such circumstances attired themselves as hospital nurses and went in search of the loved one; and so she had set out, accompanied by the ever-faithful valet, in search of Jerusalem.

“Ah, the club-paper told you where I was to be found?” put in the Baron smilingly.

“Yes—and I believe, you dear old Verdigris, that you did it purposely. You knew I should come to you.”

“Well, perhaps I did,” assented the Baron.

Then they occupied a considerable

Baron Verdigris

period of time in the manner known to all lovers, and it was not until the sun was just disappearing behind the spires and turrets of the city that Baron Verdigris turned towards his Lady with the question :

“ And didst thou suffer great hardship and privation, Lady mine ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” she answered, “ of course I had to do that. A strange old man in Malta made love to me and, when I treated him coldly, he shut me up in his castle. Fortunately, however, my faithful attendant came one dark night and rescued me from my hapless plight. But I am not going to tell you anything more just now, my Baron ; you have had quite enough excitement for one afternoon—and, besides, I must keep some of my stories wherewith to amuse you in the future.”

Baron Verdigris

It may just be mentioned, *en passant*, that the old reprobate who had attempted to ensnare the Lady Meningitis upon the Island of Malta was none other than the Lady Gora's great-grandfather, who it will be remembered had, by his passion for the Lady Mora, formed one of the by-paths of the Labyrinthic Intrigue. Thus we see that this old world of ours is very narrow.

"I'm glad that my man is here," said the Baron, after a pause. "He will be able to shave me in the morning."

"But may I not do that for you?" said the Lady Meningitis frolicsomely. "Lady-barbers, you know, my Baron, are in the fashion."

The Baron looked doubtful, as well he might. His answer was diplomatic.

"I would not give you so much

Baron Verdigris

trouble, Lady mine, for all the world. My man shall do it."

Then he went on to tell her how he had, in spite of the message he had sent her, done his best to fulfil her wishes by making love to the Lady Gora; and the Lady Meningitis was much pleased at the recital.

From this he naturally came back to his old difficulty in connection with the marriage question, which he had lost sight of since his illness. His Lady, however, utterly refused to allow such imaginary troubles to weigh upon him, and so effective did her persuasions prove that he finally agreed to marry her the very next day.

"Why should I surrender happiness to a Potential Posterity? My descendants must look after themselves!"

These were the noble words in which

Baron Verdigris

Baron Verdigris expressed his snapping of those cords of Destiny that had so long bound him.

“And now, dear,” said his Lady, “we will allow ourselves just a few more moments—you ought to have retired to rest long since, you poor, wounded old fellow—just a few moments in which to discuss our future. So strange was the chance which made my assumption of the nurse’s garb exactly the best possible under the circumstances, that I think we cannot neglect such kindness upon the part of Fortune. I did the conventional and the highly moral thing, and we have gained all by it. Therefore, let us always be conventional and highly moral in the future, and we shall prosper.”

“You are right, my dear Lady,” responded the Baron tenderly. “We will

Baron Verdigris

put our Past behind us and lead nobler lives in the future."

"We will," said the Lady Meningitis softly and fervently.

Then after a pause,

"There is just one thing," said the Baron. "We will render a last tribute to our former methods. The journey home shall constitute our wedding-trip, and we will, on this occasion only, enjoy all the luxuries and comforts afforded by Positivism."

"And travel by a P. and O. Steamer?" the Lady Meningitis suggested.

"Precisely," answered the Baron.

Just then the words of a song, proceeding from the lips of Brandolo, were wafted in through the open casement.

Ratlines and Haversacks,

Oddzooks, Grammercy and the rest!

See the vessel homeward tacks,

Hark! the mizzen strains and cracks,

Baron Verdigris

Shrieking, "See the glad waves roll O!

Coming in from Pole to Pole O!"

Crying, "See the Knight Brandolo,

Proudest victor in the quest!"

"I am so glad that Brandolo is happy," murmured the Lady Meningitis softly, as the last notes of his song died away in the distance.

"We are all happy," responded Baron Verdigris earnestly. "Honesty is undoubtedly the best policy."

CHAPTER XII. AND LAST.

AS usual, the limpid waters of the Mediterranean were very blue, as was also the clear, unclouded sky that arched above.

The P. and O. Steamship *Clandergarty* sped lightly over the frolicking waves, and from her deck proceeded the pleasant sounds of sailors' shouting and of girlish laughter. It was a merry party that the captain of the vessel had welcomed on board at Suez, and the passengers who had come out from Sydney, and who were beginning to be a good deal bored by the voyage, suddenly took heart of grace and became infected by the festive enthusiasm of the new-comers.

Baron Verdigris

There was Peter the Hermit, waxed more fat and jovial than ever; there was the Baron Verdigris, accompanied by his Lady Meningitis, and the Knight Brandolo with his Lady Gora. The rest of the party consisted of the six Crusaders whom we last saw struck down by pneumonia, and who had nobly performed their duty towards this Romance by recovering and by marrying each the faithful nurse who had brought him back to health and strength.

The Lady Meningitis, with that air of peculiar graciousness which she knew so well how to assume, had declared that she would continue to wear the dress in which she had found her Baron, and that they would all be nurses together: the Lady Gora had followed her example, and the first thought of the captain of the *Clandergarty*, when he saw the eight

Baron Verdigris

ladies come on board his ship, was that some error had been made, and that his vessel had been mistaken for a floating hospital.

A word of explanation, however, from the Baron and simultaneous glances from eight pairs of beautiful eyes had made everything right with the good-natured and susceptible captain, and since Suez the time had been passed all too quickly in dances, private theatricals, and flirtations.

Amongst other things, Baron Verdigris had suggested that they should get up a *tableau vivant* representing the Capture of Jerusalem; and had pointed out that there would be little trouble about costumes, since he and his knights were already suitably attired.

The *tableau* had proved an entire success, as had a large ball on deck which

Baron Verdigris

the indefatigable Baron had also organised. It was a pretty sight to see the mailed Crusaders waxing boisterous in two double-sets of Kitchen Lancers, which were all the merrier because not one of them knew any of the figures. But perhaps the most picturesque effect of all was produced when the Baron held out his mailed hand to his Lady and lightly led her down the deck to the step of the *Pas-de-Quatre*.

Peter the Hermit entered into the general hilarity with a keen gusto, and it was not until they were half way home that he began to be troubled. One night he took the Baron aside and explained to him the cause of his anxiety.

"I don't know, Verdigris," he said, "how time is passing, but it seems to me that we have done a good deal since we first left Malta, and I fear that the time

Baron Verdigris

for the First Crusade draws all too near. I simply cannot allow myself to be late for that."

"Oh, that's all right, good Hermit," responded the Baron. "I told you the date was 1095, but I have since found that the best authorities agree that it takes place in 1096; so you have ample time before you."

Peter's face assumed an expression of roseate joy on hearing that his fears were, after all, groundless.

"Ah, that is well, Baron!" he exclaimed. "I shall have a yet longer rest than I had hoped for. I am glad, too, that the time will be spent in England because, although the wines at the Crusaders' Club in Jerusalem are undoubtedly good, yet those at the Piccadilly establishment are infinitely better."

"I' faith, good Peter," quoth the Baron

Baron Verdigris

estingly, "thou hast a reverence for thy palate."

"As becomes a good man," responded Peter, smiling.

It was a few days after this conversation that the Baron and the Lady Meningitis occupied a secluded portion of the deck.

The Baron was singing one of his inimitable songs in his rich bass voice.

"That is very nice," said the Curate, when he had finished. "Do you sing much?"

"Oh, just a little now and then," answered the Baron airily, "merely by way of amusement, you know."

"I have made a special study of it," the Curate remarked. "Would you like to hear me sing?"

"Charmed!" said the Baron, with a courageousness that did him infinite credit.

Baron Verdigris

“A trifle of my own,” murmured the Curate, as he commenced his song.

Where the Nile's spice-scented Delta
Laughs in echo to the sky,
And the fervid sunbeams welter
In the depths of Heaven high :

There a maiden full of beauty
Wades the palpitating waves,
And she winds the threads of duty
From the lone Egyptian graves.

Oh my maiden, oh my darling,
Thou art passioned, yet art good !
And thy voice is like the starling
Twittering dove-like in the wood.

And my heart is gone a-wailing
To thy far Egyptian land,
And I know its action's failing,
Tho' I cannot understand.

The Curate had ended his song.
Baron Verdigris was leaning over the
side of the vessel, and his shoulders were
shaking.

Baron Verdigris

"Are you unwell?" asked the Curate anxiously.

The Baron, by a great effort, regained his self-possession and turned to the Curate.

"I thank you, no. I was merely overcome by emotion," he said.

"Ah, yes. They are rather pretty words, are they not?" the Curate remarked.

"Very," responded the Baron, with quite a respectable show of warmth.

"You see, in writing words to this kind of song, the great thing is to leave much to the imagination. It helps oneself, too, so much to adopt that method. For instance, I know very little about Egypt except that it has a River Nile with a Delta. Yet I have no doubt that you considered me quite *au fait* with the local colour."

Baron Verdigris

“Quite,” again assented the Baron, a trifle more wearily this time.

“And then to introduce passion delicately—and morally: that is a great Art.

‘Thou art passioned, yet art good.’

What could be more chaste and yet more absolutely suggestive of pleasant naughtiness? The touch, too, about duty and lone graves is, I flatter myself, well-nigh perfect. No one, not even myself, knows what it means. It is ineffable!”

“It is beautiful,” said the Baron.

“So glad you think so. I have written no fewer than six hundred songs of that class, and they are all immensely popular. I will sing you another.”

The Baron rose from his seat.

“I think not!” he said, firmly but respectfully, as he took up the Curate

Baron Verdigris

and dropped him gently over the side of the vessel.

“Man overboard!” shouted the look-out.

As the Captain came hurrying along, Baron Verdigris took him aside.

“It is only the Curate,” he explained. “He has written six hundred songs, and I thought that the time was ripe for his demise.”

“You are sure that he has written six hundred?” asked the Captain.

“Yes, there is no question of it,” responded the Baron.

“In that case,” the Captain said, “we need not trouble to stop for him. I once heard him sing.”

Then his voice rang out like a thunder-clap.

“Full steam ahead!” he roared.

From this little incident it will be seen

Baron Verdigris

that the Baron was early beginning that new life of usefulness and morality upon which he had resolved.

“Dear old Verdigris!” murmured his Lady approvingly, as he rejoined her.

Presently they were lost in the discussion of blanket-clubs and reading-rooms for the serfs, socmen, and villeins within their domains. At what better period could we close this Romance, leaving, as we do, every one happy, contented, and full of great plans for future usefulness?

And, as I write these last words, the faint echo of church bells is borne to my ears, rung by a tenantry which is rapturously welcoming home a noble Liege and his beautiful, beneficent Lady.

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