Strange Tales of Amazing Frauds

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and

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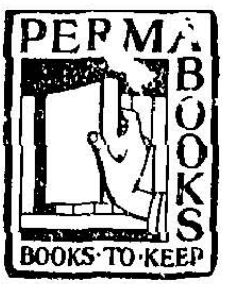

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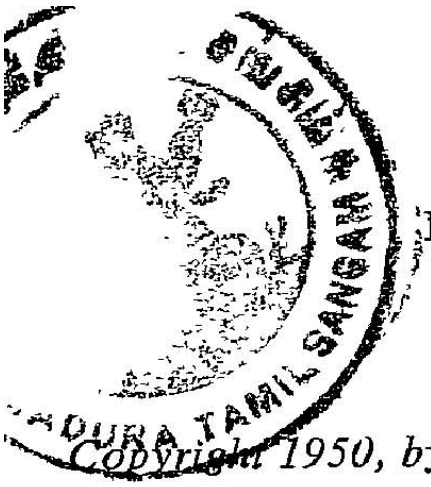

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THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

PARIS is a Mecca for art lovers. First-rate paintings are almost as plentifully displayed in this metropolis as billboard posters in the United States. Art is a serious business in Paris, as serious as loving or dying. The same cannot be said of many places on this earth.

Earlier this season, in a small Manhattan art shop on Fifty-seventh Street, I had come across my first canvas by that master painter of the occult, Auguste St. Rédant. Like several others who have fallen under his spell, I took the earliest opportunity to cross the ocean and search St. Rédant's native country for more specimens of his genius.

The day after my arrival in Paris, I walked into a small basement shop in the Rue St. Etienne which was devoted to paintings and rare editions. This shop was owned by a Syrian with large glowing eyes and tobacco-stained fingers. When I mentioned St. Rédant, he shook his head sadly. "Ah, monsieur, great as he is, St. Rédant unfortunately does not sell well among his countrymen. Therefore I have no canvas by him in the shop. But you are a man after my heart. There are too few of us who appreciate him."

I was pleased to find a man who shared my pet enthusiasm. "One must have an inner eye," I volunteered, "an ability to draw aside the veil of the senses, to understand St. Rédant."

"Yes," agreed the Syrian. "When the secrets of the Orient shall become as clear to the Western mind as a text for schoolboys, this painter will really come into his own." His eyes had the look of an ancient priest, and even his yellow, decaying teeth did not detract from the beauty of his face as he spoke.

Suddenly he excused himself and disappeared into a back chamber of the shop. In a moment he returned with a pocket-sized volume which he handed over to me.

"Monsieur," he declared, "you came here seeking St. Rédant

in vain. But you shall go home rewarded. May I recommend the author of this little tome—the Auguste St. Rédant of the pen?"

The volume was bound in crimson vellum. In the upper right corner, stamped in gold, was the author's signature, Sieur de Cagliostro.

"Cagliostro!" I murmured. My curiosity was immediately aroused. "Sieur de Cagliostro, the great philosopher of the occult!"

"Monsieur," continued the Syrian. "You have heard of the Affair of the Diamond Necklace?"

"If I am not mistaken, you refer to the two-million-dollar necklace that was stolen during the reign of Louis XVI?"

"Yes, monsieur. It was one of the greatest scandals of all time. It has intrigued and plagued the imaginations of more novelists, playwrights, philosophers than practically any other event in history. The most amazing personalities flitted across the stage, playing their ill-fated roles in that terrible drama. Princes and courtesans, queen and criminals, the great of the earth and the little. But you must be wondering what this has to do with our mutual passion for the mystic sciences?"

The Syrian ran his skinny brown fingers over the counter. "Perhaps, monsieur, you are aware that the Sieur de Cagliostro played an important role in the Affair of the Diamond Necklace?"

"I have heard so," I replied. "But, to confess the truth, I have never been able to understand how this great philosopher could have become involved in so tawdry an affair."

"Ah, my friend, you are not alone in being baffled. The whole world has been mystified ever since. And yet suppose I were to tell you that the answer for which you and every student of human nature has been seeking lies within the pages of the little book you hold! How it came into my hands is a story in itself." He cleared his throat. "Since you are apparently a genuine admirer of the Sieur de Cagliostro, I want you to read this extraordinary narrative."

I thanked the Syrian profusely, but when I inquired about the price of the volume, he held up a bony hand. "Monsieur, I will not sell it for the world. I am merely suggesting that you borrow it for this evening. I would like you to return it to me in the morning."

He gave a peculiar little shrug and his shrewd eyes twinkled. "I know I can trust an admirer of Auguste St. Rédant."

That night, in my hotel room overlooking the Place de la République, I settled myself by my reading lamp and plunged into the amazing story of the Diamond Necklace.

One afternoon during the memorably cold winter of 1784, in Paris, a cabriolet turned into the Rue St. Claude and stopped at the entrance to an impressive stone mansion. A giant Swiss guard, dressed in the uniform traditional at Versailles, alighted from the carriage and pulled on the door knocker. To the servant who answered his summons, he announced: "I have a message for the Sieur de Cagliostro. Will you please tell him that he has been summoned to Versailles. A carriage awaits him at the door."

The servant turned, crossed the vestibule, and entered an apartment furnished with consoles of carved ebony and splendid Chinese screens, set off by vases filled with exotic flowers.

The servant rang a bell; the door at one end of the chamber swung open and a second servant entered the room. "The master has been summoned to Versailles, Jacques. A carriage awaits him at the entrance."

The newcomer nodded, turned on his heels, entering a second apartment furnished as lavishly as the first. Beside a wardrobe of carved oak stood a statue of Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine. The servant pressed a fold of his toga and released a spring. A portion of the wall from the base to its magnificently carved molding folded back on hinges, revealing a flight of stairs. He ascended them and passed into the inner portion of the house—or, more properly, the house within the house—where the master actually lived. Here in a small antechamber, decorated in rose damask, the servant paused before a brick white fireplace six feet high. Once more he pressed a button. The entire back wall of the fireplace rolled aside noiselessly. A stunted old fellow with legs of uneven length, but a marvelously intelligent face, limped through the entrance of the fireplace into the antechamber to meet this servant.

The servant bowed. "The master has been summoned to Versailles, Monsieur Le Franc. A carriage has been placed at his disposal."

The cripple nodded. "I will inform him."

He turned and walked painfully up a flight of stairs leading to a suite of apartments. In the first of these sat the Sieur de Cagliostro himself, writing a letter. The room was spread with carpets and coverings from Arabia. The walls were completely windowless. Yet this chamber was in some mysterious fashion filled with fresh air. Lamps with wicks dipped in spice oils burned day and night.

As Cagliostro looked up at the entrance of his chief amanuensis, he revealed a smooth, round face, a nose with well-arched nostrils, a full mouth, and limpid, frank eyes. So mobile were his features that an artist might have drawn two entirely contrasting portraits of him and both would have been absolute likenesses. There was something about him that repelled even while it strongly attracted. The over-all effect was to stimulate in people a dangerous curiosity in the man.

He was dressed in scarlet breeches and an iron-gray waistcoat trimmed with Spanish lace. His shirt was open at the neck. His hair was abundantly plaited into several tresses and tied up club-fashion with a ribbon. His stockings were of mottled silk. He wore diamonds of the purest water on his fingers. They studded his shirt front and hung from his watch and chain.

"Monsieur le comte, you have been summoned to Versailles," reported the cripple with a bow. "Your immediate presence is requested."

Cagliostro frowned. "By whose order am I to go, Sapristo?"

"I cannot say, monsieur; that has not appeared in the summons. Perhaps—the King!" he added wishfully.

"Bah!" snorted the count. "No chance of it! That sluggard has the soul of a cobbler, not a prince. He is not interested in my prophecies."

The count put down his quill and rose to stretch his legs. "Sapristo," he said with a mischievous smile, "shall I treat my mysterious host to a demonstration of what the unbelievers vulgarly call my gifts of magic? Shall I summon the dead kings of France to arise again within the walls of the royal château, or place a vision of the future before dim-sighted eyes?"

"Ah, monsieur," replied the cripple reverently, "the crowned heads of Russia, Sweden, Germany have all paid tribute to your genius. Why shouldn't the Bourbons be compelled to acknowledge it also?"

The count took a few quick paces around the chamber, his hands behind him. "Well, Sapristo," he said abruptly, "I shall attend the summons."

He strode with nervous rapidity from the apartment, down the several flights of stairs, passed through a suite of palatial chambers, and reached the vestibule where the Swiss guard awaited him. Here a servant helped him into a sky-blue coat. The count donned a magnificent hat plumed with white feathers. The law required that white feathers be worn by all medical practitioners, peddlers of drugs, healers, mountebanks, and toothdrawers.

Then the count entered the cabriolet while the Swiss mounted the elevated dasher and took his seat beside the driver. With a flick of the groom's whip, the horse broke into a trot. The Sieur de Cagliostro, formerly Joseph Balsamo, the beggar, was off for the royal palace. He had come a long way up fortune's ladder.

The distance from Paris to Versailles was almost five miles. Travel was slow because of the severity of the winter. The icy ground was dangerously treacherous for the hoofs of the Irish bay. Two or three times he skidded and narrowly missed plunging the carriage into the towering snowdrifts on the sides of the road.

On the way, gilded sleighs upholstered in vermilion leather, carrying ladies of fashion whose faces were heightened by the wind to a scarlet hue, skimmed past them. Sleighing was a sport made popular at court by the Queen. The lakes and ponds, as well as the roads for miles around Versailles, tinkled with the golden bells of the steeds.

For the *haute noblesse* this winter of 1784 was a lark. For the poor it was a catastrophe. As the carriage bearing the count passed through the winding streets of Versailles, peasant women, their skirts tucked into boots, sat huddled in stalls half buried by the snow, calling out their wares in an agonizing singsong, while their red-rimmed eyes and hunger-pinched faces told of a suffering beyond despair. Prostitutes stood shivering against the icicle-girdled walls, pathetically hoping for an evening's bed and fire.

Even the approaches to the royal palace lost some of their magnificence, buried as they were under the anonymity of snow. The orange groves, the carefully planted specimens of

exotic trees were seré. The magnificently laid out English gardens, the prairies, the artificial lakes, the Swiss chalet, lay lifeless in a shroud. But those Gothic horrors, the griffons and ghouls and gorgons of brass and marble that studded the park and the terraces in the most unexpected places, leered through the ice with even greater frightfulness.

The carriage proceeded, curiously enough, not to the main *portière* of the château, but to a side entrance in the wing. Apparently the driver had orders to bring his passenger into the palace as unobtrusively as possible. At this entrance the count was met by an equerry, who conducted him into a splendid apartment whose paneled walls were decorated with Cupids bearing quivers of arrows and whose ceilings sparkled with nymphlike ladies and nude goddesses by Watteau. Here a tall, spidery-limbed gentleman, dressed in the black of the ecclesiastic, with a face of extraordinary ugliness, came forward and bowed. The count recognized this individual as the Abbé Vermond, having seen him at various levees. He had heard stories about the abbé, who had worked his way into considerable influence at court. As private secretary to the Queen, this archtempter and hypocrite exercised malevolent power over Her Majesty. He urged her to indiscretions, and then, in his role of priest, absolved her conscience of all feelings of guilt.

"Ah, Monsieur le comte," smiled the abbé. "I have been expecting you."

The count bowed in acknowledgment. "I am at your service. What is your wish?"

The abbé put a finger to his lips mysteriously. "The person who has invited you desires to meet you in privacy. It is a matter of extreme delicacy. Follow me, monsieur."

Built by the Bourbons to facilitate their amorous intrigues, the Château of Versailles abounded in mysterious turnings and twistings. Courtesans and duchesses, emerging at midnight from a tryst with princes of the blood, stole along dimly lighted passageways and escaped through cunningly contrived exits, leaving their secrets forever behind them.

It was along one such corridor, lighted only by wax tapers at rare intervals, that the Abbé Vermond conducted the Count de Cagliostro. Suddenly they reached a landing where a stone statue of Medusa glared from the shadows, as if to shrivel all mortal flesh. Here they made a turn and ascended a flight of

stairs, turned again and proceeded up a second stairway. As they ascended higher and higher, a series of baffling turns, Cagliostro grew progressively more amazed. So successfully were its true dimensions masked by the architecture that a casual observer from his position on the ground would never have guessed the actual height of the château.

Finally, when they could climb no farther, the abbé turned the knob of a door and conducted the count into a room furnished with startling simplicity in contrast to the royal apartments below. A console; a few easy chairs in Utrecht leather; several paintings on the wall by the fashionable Vernet; a vase of roses; and, in one corner, a harpsichord. That was all. It seemed more like the sitting room of a bourgeois family than a chamber of the palace. This room led through an arched doorway into a plainly furnished bedroom and into a small billiard chamber. The abbé bade the count be seated and took his leave. The count doffed his hat, shed his topcoat, and relaxed.

Within a few moments light footsteps sounded on the outside stairway. Then the door opened, and in walked a young lady. The heightened color of her cheeks, the shortness of her breath indicated that she had rapidly ascended the stairs from the out-of-doors. She walked over to the console without so much as glancing at the count. Quickly she laid down a parasol of Chinese design, doffed her mantle of embroidered muslin, and divested herself of her bonnet, revealing a head of beautiful chestnut hair. Only then did she acknowledge Cagliostro, who had fallen on his knees. "Monsieur le comte, arise. No ceremony, if you please!"

He regained his feet. "Your Majesty. I am overwhelmed . . ."

"Overwhelmed that it is the Queen who has summoned you?" Marie Antoinette finished his sentence. "And summoned you, moreover, not to the royal apartments but to this retreat?"

She tossed her head—one of her most charming mannerisms. "Monsieur, can you not believe that there are times when I try to forget that I am Queen of France? I have set aside this apartment to which I can retire with a few intimate friends. Here we sup quietly and play a game of billiards. We amuse ourselves like simple human beings."

"I understand entirely, Your Majesty."

The count looked earnestly into the face of the woman who thus addressed him. He had never before been privileged to see the Queen so close at hand. Rapidly he took note of her features. She was small of stature, with a dazzlingly white complexion, soft blue eyes shaded by full, long lashes, an aquiline nose, a small, beautifully curved little mouth, marred only by the slight protrusion of the lower lip—a family trait. Yes, he decided, this daughter of Maria Theresa was the most desirable woman who had ever sat upon the throne of France. And pity welled up suddenly in his heart. For he had sworn to destroy her!

"Monsieur le comte," asked Marie Antoinette after a pause, "do you wonder why I have summoned you?" She walked over to the bouquet of roses resting in a slender vase. She bent over and inhaled the perfume of the flowers. Then, with her back still to the count, she murmured, "Tell me the truth. Have you not heard evil gossip about me?"

For several seconds the count hesitated. Then he answered with assurance, "Your Majesty, that is impossible. I have heard only flattery."

She wheeled around in sudden anger. "Do not deceive me, monsieur. Do you think I lack eyes and ears? Do you suppose that I am ignorant of the slanders that are whispered about me, the obscene songs, the pamphlets that are circulated all over France! Do you suppose that I am unaware that my enemies call me the 'Austrian she-wolf'! That Monsieur Vergennes, the King's own minister, sends regular reports about my behavior which Louis reads behind my back!"

She looked sharply at the count. "Tell me, monsieur, what have *you* heard about the Queen?"

The count remained silent.

"I command you to speak!"

"I have heard that Your Majesty is fond of slipping secretly out of the palace as a woman of the streets; that you frequently rub shoulders with strangers in the public parks and the cafés."

"Yes," replied Marie Antoinette, her eyes blazing. "Continue."

"I have heard that once Your Majesty actually climbed into the driver's seat of a cabriolet, took the reins, and rode the horse at a speed that caused a riot in the slums of Paris!"

"Go on!"

"I have also heard," continued the count, his manner suddenly growing deeply serious, "that when the King goes off to bed, the Queen goes with companions to the gambling tables and plays until sunrise; that she loses a thousand louis d'ors a night at faro!"

The Queen blushed, and her eyes grew sad. At this moment she was more beautiful than ever. "Ah, it is true, monsieur. The excitement of play is strong in me. Why deny it? But the money I squander is mine—mine alone. Those who have spread the report that I draw upon public funds earmarked for charity to pay my gambling debts lie! They lie, Monsieur le comte!"

She walked nervously up and down the room, clasping and unclasping her hands. Finally she recovered sufficient calm to continue. "Monsieur, it is imperative that I give my enemies no further opportunity for slandering me. Unfortunately I am confronted with a serious new embarrassment. I cannot sit helplessly by while the rumor of this reaches the ears of those who wish me ill. That is why I have summoned you."

"Your Majesty, I do not understand."

"Monsieur, I have had a run of frightful luck at the table. Night after night I have staked a fortune and lost. Formerly, when the money the King has set aside for my pleasures ran low, I simply went to him and asked for more. But the time has come when I no longer dare ask Louis to pay my debts. I am desperate. I cannot meet my creditors."

"But how can I help, madame?" asked the count.

Marie Antoinette looked at him craftily. "Monsieur, there need be no secrets between us. You may speak freely of your talents in this room. Just as you have been bold enough to tell me what people say of me, I shall now report what is being whispered about yourself."

"What is that?"

"People say you have learned the secret of making gold!"

"Madame!"

"Gold, monsieur, ingots of gold—developed according to a formula you alone have discovered; heated in giant crucibles in your laboratory at home. And not only gold, monsieur, but diamonds, pearls, emeralds. Do you deny it?"

"No," replied the count slowly. "I cannot deny it."

Marie Antoinette bent very close to the count and fixed him with her eyes. Her face was flushed with passion. The subtle

scent of her perfume, vervain blended with mignonette, almost maddened him.

"Then, monsieur, what matters a win or a loss at faro when a princess is favored by you!"

The count looked at the Queen with a mingling of pity and scorn. Poor, misguided woman; married for years to a clumsy bear of a king who was unable to perform the physical duties of a husband. By way of compensation, she had plunged into a life of hysterical pleasure, lavishing on herself sums of money that would have appalled even the mistresses of Louis XIV and Louis XV. Suddenly the heart of the count grew hard within him. He had his duty to perform. He must lure her further along the road to catastrophe.

"Yes, Your Majesty," he said with a bow. "All that you have heard is true. I make gold according to a recipe I have inherited from my old master, Althotas, the former Grand Cophta of the Egyptian Mysteries. I have shaped pure ingots thick as loaves of bread, each valued by goldsmiths at a hundred thousand crowns. I have created diamonds without a flaw. I live the life of a prince on the income I afford myself." He smiled and there was a touch of the devil in his eye. "As a matter of fact, I once supplied Julius Caesar with the money necessary to finance an expedition against his mortal enemy, Pompey."

The Queen drew herself up with a start. "What, monsieur, you knew Julius Caesar!"

"Your Majesty," bowed the count. "Permit me to mention, among my other achievements, that I have discovered the elixir of life everlasting. I myself have lived two thousand years, renewing my youth every generation!"

"*Pardieu,* monsieur, you are Mephistopheles himself!"

"Not Mephistopheles—merely a student of the Cabala. There is in the occult sciences of the East much to stagger the Western mind." He paused and cast shrewd eyes upon the Queen. "Your Majesty, I have dined with Cleopatra on numerous occasions, and once or twice with the Queen of Sheba. Let me confess that they were not one whit more beautiful than yourself."

Marie Antoinette smiled. "Monsieur le comte, your friendships must have been extraordinary."

"Indeed they were! And I have had some tragic associations as well. I was very intimate with Nero and exceedingly fond

of him—until he murdered his mother!" The count sighed. "Several of my friendships were particularly fruitful, however. From Hippocrates I learned the science of healing, which I have successfully employed ever since."

"What, monsieur, you are a healer too!"

"Can it be possible, Your Majesty, that you have not heard how I saved the Prince de Soubise from the brink of death in Strasbourg? Many a cripple can walk again because of my humble science!" He paused with his hands folded rather unctuously. Then he returned to the business of the moment.

"Thank God, Your Majesty, that your health is sound and your limbs are whole. You are much too young and beautiful to want my elixir. There is, however, as you have suggested, one important respect in which I can serve you." He held her in a glance of his powerful eyes.

"I will give you the funds with which to pay your debts, and more besides. I shall fashion for Your Majesty diamonds that blaze with the purest fire, a perfect match for your charms. This I shall do for you. But in return I must ask a favor."

"And what is that, monsieur?"

"I ask that you permit me to perform an experiment with Your Majesty as my subject. I desire to look into your future."

"You read the future, monsieur?"

"With a great deal of success. It is a hobby of mine." He added in his most persuasive tones, "Who would not give a ransom to read the future of the beautiful young Queen?"

Marie Antoinette looked at him curiously. For an instant she grew pale. Then she regained her self-assurance. She tossed her head and said lightheartedly, "Very well. I agree to this whim of yours. You may proceed."

"Excellent," replied the count. Then he drew forth from one of the pockets of his sky-blue overcoat, which lay on an armchair, a bag of purest velvet. From it he extracted a small spherical bottle, tightly corked at the mouth, containing distilled water. This he placed on the table. "If you permit me to light the candles and draw the curtains, we can begin the experiment."

The Queen agreed, and the count made the necessary preparations. Of a sudden the little room was plunged into darkness, except for the beams from three rose-colored candles. The Queen's deep eyes and full lashes were luminous in the flames.

The count was completely enveloped in the shade. He moved the small bottle into the range of the candles in such a manner that the beams were focused upon the water. "Kindly look into *this* carafe, Your Majesty. Concentrate upon the light with all your faculties."

The Queen seated herself and gazed into the carafe. The water functioned as a condensing lens, turning the flames of the candles into a sharp pin point which brought the Queen to the point of extreme drowsiness. And all the while the count spoke softly to her.

The minutes passed. The count made several signs with his hands and whispered the formulas of the Cabala. "Sleep, madame, sleep!" The Queen's features became rigid. Her pupils were unnaturally fixed. The color left her cheeks. She passed into a hypnotic sleep.

The count made a further sign with his hand. Then he asked softly: "What is your name, madame?"

"Marie Antoinette."

"Gaze into the carafe, Marie Antoinette. What do you see?"

The Queen was silent for some seconds. Then she said slowly, "I see a prison cell. And through the lattice door I glimpse a woman on an iron bed. Beside her is a little dog. The woman is clothed in black, and she is a young woman; but her face is lined like a crone's with wrinkles. And her hair is completely white. She is hemorrhaging. The blood spatters the little dog at her feet."

"Cease, madame!" cried the count. For an instant he was overcome by revulsion. Then his voice relapsed into its former softness. "Look again, Marie Antoinette. What do you see now?"

The Queen replied in the same tone as before. "I see this woman dressed in weeds of mourning, her white hair concealed in a mobcap. She is riding in a cart along a boulevard lined with shrieking people. They are shouting, 'Down with Marie Antoinette!' Now she descends from the cart, without even a priest to offer her consolation. And I see her mount a wooden scaffold with a huge blade poised to strike. Her eyes are shining with defiance!"

The count bowed his head. "Yes, you have seen the truth!"

He stepped quietly to the windows, drew back the heavy curtains, and blew out the candles. Then he packed his carafe

away in its velvet bag. The light of the late afternoon stole into the room. The long delicate lashes of the Queen became suffused with the twilight.

"Mordieu," thought the count as he gazed upon her, "she is every inch a desirable woman!"

"Sleep, my beautiful Queen," he said half aloud. "Awaken within the hour and get ready for this evening's ball. Ah, but tomorrow . . ." His face grew grim. "My diamond necklace shall make tomorrow certain."

He wrapped himself in his greatcoat, and was gone.

Five months after the events described above, Prince Louis René Edouard de Rohan, Archbishop of Strasbourg, Landgrave of Alsace, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost, sat in his private study sipping Cyprian wine. The Cardinal de Rohan came from one of the greatest houses in France. Handsome, distinguished, wealthy beyond dreams—Fortune seemed to have reserved her fondest smiles for him. But actually a black cloud darkened his horizon. He was out of favor with the Queen.

For ten years the Queen had not spoken a word to him. He was banished from her private palace. He was forbidden access to Versailles, except once yearly, when, as Grand Almoner of France, he was entitled to celebrate the Holy Mass for the royal family and the court. Otherwise he was completely thrust into the shadows. In retaliation, he had retired to his summer palace in Saverne, where he had salvaged his dignity by surrounding himself with a court of his own. To Saverne, with all due ceremony, flocked a handful of nobility related to his house, certain courtiers who nursed grievances against the Queen, several minor philosophers from the salons in Paris, a dozen provincial magistrates and military officers from the neighboring garrison at Strasbourg.

The cardinal's fall from royal favor occurred during his ambassadorship to Vienna. Overweening, profligate, a notorious woman chaser, he had shocked the bourgeois sensibility of Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria and mother of Marie Antoinette. A story was freely circulated that one of the pages who accompanied the cardinal everywhere was actually a beautiful marquise in male attire. Rumors of his debaucheries were continually carried to the Empress by "The Commissioners

of Chastity," a corps she had organized for the purpose of watching over Viennese morals. The cardinal maintained such a lavish standard of living that he piled up expenditures which even he, with his tremendous income, was unable to meet. He required twenty-five *valets de chambre* to dress him. It was rumored that he had presented one of his mistresses with a gift of bonbons wrapped in treasury notes amounting to a fabulous sum.

He openly flaunted his irreligion. During one *Fête-Dieu,* when a procession of pilgrims blocked his path, he led his entire legation, mounted on horseback, recklessly through the column and scattered it, in order to keep a hunting date.

But even these moral laxities would not have doomed him to social exile if he hadn't committed the unpardonable sin of insulting royalty. He insisted upon spreading *sub rosa* stories about Marie Antoinette's indiscretions, and these reached the ears of her mother. In addition, he wrote a letter to the French foreign minister in which he mercilessly lampooned the political policies of Maria Theresa. The minister showed the letter to Louis XV, who was then King Louis, laughing heartily over it, repeated it to his mistress Du Barry at one of her *soirées.* And she, in turn, spread it all over court until it reached the ears of Marie Antoinette, the dauphiness.

From that moment the cardinal's fate was sealed. He was relieved of his ambassadorship. When Marie Antoinette became Queen, he pleaded forgiveness. But his efforts were in vain.

For the past twelve years it had been Prince Louis's chief purpose in life to be admitted once again to the favor of the court, for which his vanity craved like a flower for the sun. And just prior to the moment of which we write, he suddenly entertained hopes for success. Fortune had placed at his disposal a woman who seemed an ideal agent for his suit. This woman was the Countess Jeanne de Valois-La Motte, a descendant of a former King of France through a bastard line.

Compelled as a child to beg in the streets, she became an adventuress. By various devices she forced her way into the court and came to the attention of the Queen. Since Marie Antoinette was herself a creature of intrigue, people behind the countess claimed that she had become very close to Her Majesty.

The countess was also a friend of the cardinal's. She had promised Prince Louis to plead his suit, and apparently she suc-

ceeded where all his letters had failed. During the summer of 1784 she wrote him the news that the Queen's resistance to him had been finally overcome and that he would shortly be welcome again at Versailles.

However, the cardinal was not satisfied merely to regain the royal friendship. He dared hope that his return to court would presage something more intimate. For, let us whisper the truth, this scion of the House of Rohan believed that he would yet become the lover of the Queen. Although he was over fifty, so numerous had been his conquests that he had no doubt Her Majesty was within his reach. Indeed, he flattered himself that she had already fallen victim to his charms.

Years before, while at court, he had read significance into each look she had given him, had noted every blush. He was firmly convinced that the real reason she had sent him into exile was that, fearing the King, she had wanted to forget him. Acting on this assumption, the cardinal had asked the accommodating countess to reveal to Marie Antoinette his tender passion for her. And he was not at all surprised to receive one morning an intimation from the countess that his desire would be gratified.

Affairs of passion often move rapidly. Only a few days later, the cardinal, as we have been told, sat in his rosewood study in Saverne sipping Cyprian wine, when his servant entered with the latest mail from Paris. A thrill shot through the frame of Prince Louis; for he noticed, among the letters, an envelope bordered with violet and stamped with the fleur-de-lis. This was the private stationery of the Queen. He opened the letter and read it avidly. Then he summoned his footman. "Prepare my carriage. I am departing for Paris at once."

In no time at all Prince Louis was seated in his post chaise on the first leg of a two-hundred-and-seventy-mile journey to the capital. During the trip he unfolded the mauve-tinted letter and perused it over and over again. He could scarcely believe his eyes. In his wildest imaginings he had never believed that such good fortune would come to him as quickly and as easily as this. It read:

MONSIGNOR,

I have longed for some time to let you know that your suit has found complete favor with me. But one has to be discreet.

The wished-for moment, the open return to court, has not yet arrived. However, if you are sincere in your desire to renew our friendship, you will be happy to learn that on the evening of August 2, between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock, I shall be taking an airing—alone—in the garden of Versailles. If you so wish, you may meet me in the Grove of Venus. But I warn you to come in the greatest secrecy and perfectly disguised.

MARIE ANTOINETTE DE FRANCE

The heart of the cardinal beat wildly. He had no time to lose. The second of August was less than a week away.

For all his fifty-odd years, Prince Louis felt suddenly young again. He looked forward to this tryst with the excitement of a boy anticipating his first conquest. It flattered his vanity not a little that a Rohan was about to make a cuckold of a Bourbon.

Upon his arrival in Paris, he drove to the Palais-Cardinal, his town house, to await the date of the meeting. The following nights he slept hardly a wink. The fires of a volcano raged in him. He ached with desire.

The night of the second of August was one of heavy skies. The moon failed to rise. Precisely at the hour of ten the Prince de Rohan, wrapped in a cloak of simple black and wearing a tremendous cap whose brim concealed the upper portion of his face, rode an Irish bay up to an obscure gate of the royal park. By judicious bribing of the keeper, he obtained the key. He quietly unlocked the gate, and rode over to a marble bathhouse behind which he tethered his horse. Then he continued the remainder of the distance on foot. His eyes became accustomed to the night as he proceeded. He knew this park well, and it was not difficult for him to find the meeting place even in the dark. Soon he felt the velvet softness of grass under his feet, and he realized he was crossing the ground that led to a narrow arbor bordering the Grove of Venus. This arbor was completely enclosed on the left-hand side by a hedge of hornbeam supported by a low latticework fence, and on the right by a high, spacious wall. Here he stopped and waited. His pulse pounded madly.

Soon she came. A frail figure of a woman. Her white robe *en chemise,* her delicately laced hood, made her appear like a vision. Her face was indistinct in the darkness.

In an instant he was on his knees, head bowed. She approached and held out her hand. He kissed it. He felt for all the world as though this were a piece being acted on a stage to the soft music of an orchestra playing in the wings. She dropped a rose at his feet. Instinctively, he picked it up and pressed it to his lips.

"Monsieur le cardinal," she said in a strange, faraway voice, "the past is forgiven. . . . You may return to me. . . ."

A sob shook his frame. He rose to his feet. His senses were on fire. He clasped her hungrily in his arms, seeking her lips. But she averted her face. In an instant she grew rigid. Footsteps suddenly sounded on the gravel path leading to the arbor—the footsteps of men wearing boots, proceeding at a rapid pace.

She tore herself from his arms. "Go quickly, quickly—the guards!"

There was not a moment to lose. Without a word, he vaulted the lattice fence and lowered himself on his knees behind the hedge of luxurious shrubbery. She disappeared through the entrance of the arbor, a blur of white fading into the night. Within a half minute a detachment of guards, on their way to their sentry posts, passed through the arbor in double time and vanished into the grove beyond.

The cardinal rose to his feet and cursed his luck. This interview had been over almost before it had begun. What an ending to his dreams! He made his way slowly back to his horse half dazed. But for all his chagrin, he looked forward to another meeting with the Queen. His appetite was thoroughly aroused. For several days he remained at the Palais-Cardinal anxiously awaiting a message from her inviting him to a second tryst. None came.

Then suddenly, one morning, the Countess de La Motte drove up in her carriage. Her small, delicate hand pressed the cardinal's with warmth.

"Madame, how fares the Queen?" he asked feverishly.

"Splendidly, monsieur le cardinal," replied the countess. "She speaks daily of you. Trust her with all your heart."

Her dark eyes shone with excitement. "As proof of her deep regard for you, monsieur, she desires that you undertake a business which she is willing to entrust to you alone. It is a question of a very secret and delicate negotiation. It requires

the utmost finesse in the handling. One false move will destroy her happiness."

"Go on, madame!"

"It involves a diamond necklace. Permit me to explain. Ten years ago, when the present King was still the dauphin, his grandfather, Louis XV, sent for the crown jewelers Boehmer and Bassenge, and ordered them to fashion for the Countess Du Barry the most priceless necklace the world has ever seen. The jewelers invested a fortune to carry out the royal wish. They scoured the four corners of the globe. From the mines of Peru, the temples of India, from the precious heirlooms of Russia, Germany, Spain, they selected the most valuable brilliants of the ages and strung them together into a single necklace for the throat of the King's beautiful mistress. But as soon as the necklace was completed, the King died. Madame Du Barry was banished from court. The necklace has remained unsold ever since, in the hands of Boehmer and Bassenge.

The countess drew forth a cambric handkerchief and moistened her lips. "The Queen for years has had her heart set upon acquiring this necklace for herself. However, as you can well understand, she is unwilling to involve the King in such a matter. And so she has turned to you, monsieur, to act as her agent. There is little time to lose, for the King of Portugal has suddenly put in a bid for it. It would be a shame for the necklace to leave this country."

The cardinal fingered his chin reflectively. "What is the price of this *bijouterie?*"

"Since it has become a white elephant for the jewelers, they have drastically reduced their price, monsieur. They are asking only one million six hundred thousand francs."

"Pardieu! Almost enough to finance a war," retorted the cardinal. "A king's ransom!"

"Have no fear. The Queen has the necessary money to meet the installments, monsieur."

"I see. And I am to act as her surety."

The cardinal walked back and forth with his hands clasped behind him. He reviewed in his mind the meeting in the park at Versailles. There would be other meetings. Now here was an opportunity to make a tremendous investment in his future. By a single stroke he would put her entirely in his debt. Perhaps he would become not only her lover but another Richelieu or

Mazarin, a power behind the throne. And her money was good; there was no doubt of that. Was it not backed by the King?

"Eh bien," he said. "It is agreed. A Rohan will be surety for the Queen."

"The deal must be closed at once," urged the countess. "The Queen desires to wear the necklace at an early function."

"I am ready," replied the cardinal. And he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "I will enter into this affair with all the caution of a conspirator."

Two days later the cardinal and the countess drove up to the Grand Balcony, Place Vendôme, where the crown jewelers resided and carried on their business. It was a magnificent house that confronted them, with a monumental iron-wrought balcony overlooking a splendid courtyard. The main door was secured with immense locks, studded with large nails which were arranged in such a manner as to thwart any stroke of the burglar's file.

At the cardinal's knock, the head of a woman peered through a wicket opening and a voice asked him his business. When the cardinal replied, the huge door swung open and the visitors were ushered into the presence of the Messieurs Boehmer and Bassenge.

Upon learning the reason for the visit, the shrewd faces of the little jewelers were wreathed with smiles of joy.

"Ah, this is tremendous news," said Boehmer. "We have sunk our entire fortune into these jewels; and now, after ten years of waiting, God has favored us at last!"

His partner, Bassenge, went to the vault, withdrew from it a case of rich black velvet, and laid it on the buffet. He opened the case. The countess clasped her hands. There before them, in glowing, angry magnificence, sparkled a row of seventeen diamonds, almost as large as filberts, hanging from star-shaped pendants. And below them, at the level of the bosom, sparkled a queen diamond, the prize of them all. Each stone had a background of romance that beggared the imagination. One had served as the eye of a Hindu idol four thousand years ago. Stolen from the temple, it had passed into the hands of generations of adventurers over games of dice. Another had brightened the palace of a Venetian doge. Several had come from the crown of the medieval czars of Russia. One had been

seized by lieutenants of Pizarro during his plunder of Peru. Numerous men had given their lives for each.

The cardinal, used as he was to magnificence, could hardly suppress a low exclamation. *Mordieu!* Why, the tassels alone would have taken some men's fortunes!

But after a moment Prince Louis controlled himself and looked up at the jewelers, his face a perfect study in indifference.

"The price is outrageously high," he frowned. "You ask a million and a half francs for a necklace!"

"Monsieur," replied Boehmer cynically, "no price is too high when a beautiful woman is concerned."

"Voilà! What are your terms?"

"We ask to be paid," declared Boehmer, "in four installments. The first to fall due six months after the date of purchase. We understand, monsieur le cardinal, that you are empowered to act as surety for the Queen. However, as a matter of form, we should like to have a letter of authorization from Her Majesty."

A look of embarrassment came into the cardinal's face. He turned to the countess. "Madame, here, has given me Her Majesty's word for the purchase."

The Countess de La Motte quickly summoned her footman and took from him a portfolio which she handed over to the cardinal. "The Queen has given me the authorization," she declared. "Examine it, messieurs, for your own satisfaction."

It was a letter empowering the cardinal to draw up the contract. It was signed, *"Approuvée, Marie Antoinette de France."* Since the transaction was too delicate to be entrusted to a professional engrosser, the cardinal wrote out the contract in his own handwriting and signed his name. Thus, with one stroke of the pen, he pledged his own resources to guarantee the transaction.

Several days afterward the cardinal sent for the necklace. It was brought to his house at midnight. He handed it over to the Countess de La Motte for safe delivery to the Queen. Then Prince Louis, pleased with having carried out his role to the satisfaction of the Queen, settled down to await results. And, surely enough, within a few days he received the familiar *vignette bleu* conveying the thanks of Her Majesty. These were

followed in the next few weeks by letters expressing her deep affection and hinting of future meetings which would fully compensate him for the disappointing tryst at Versailles.

The cardinal, on his part, sent the Queen a gift of a white Spanish cocker through the Countess de La Motte. And when Her Majesty requested that he contribute money to her charities, he sent through the countess sums totaling one hundred fifty thousand francs.

But as the weeks passed into months, and the Queen's affectionate notes were not translated into any decisive action, the cardinal grew angry. He sent letter after letter imploring the Queen to name a date for a meeting. But she refused to comply.

The cardinal feverishly paced his garden. The famous walk leading to his woods, which he had prepared to rebaptize the "Highway of Love" as soon as he had consummated his passion, retained its old name, the "Road to Happiness," which, under the circumstances, was a title of sheer mockery.

Finally, on the day of the Assumption, long after the purchase of the necklace, the cardinal prepared to make his annual trip to Versailles to celebrate High Mass. It was the first time since the tryst that he would look upon the Queen.

It was customary on this day for the King and Queen to proceed from their royal apartments to the Salle de l'Oeil-de-Boeuf, where the court awaited them; and, from thence, to lead the procession to the chapel. The Salle de l'Oeil-de-Boeuf, as always on this day, was thronged with high nobility, marshals of the armed forces, great ministers of state. The men were dressed in their robes of office. The women were clothed in the finest brocade from the looms of Lyons and Aubusson. They were heavily rouged, and many wore beauty patches on their cheeks. For the cardinal this was a day of glory. Tall, stoutish, and still handsome for all his fifty-odd years, he was a figure of magnificence in his rich velvet robe of scarlet, his exquisitely embroidered alb bearing his family device in the form of medallions and brilliant flowers. All eyes were upon him.

Suddenly the assemblage became hushed. The doors were flung open, and a tall Swiss guard stepped forward. But to everyone's surprise, he did not announce, "Ladies and gentle-

men, the King!" Instead he declared: "His Majesty summons the Cardinal Prince de Rohan to attend him in the royal cabinet."

Prince Louis, baffled, followed the guard over the short distance to the King's apartment. Upon entering, he was astonished to find himself in the presence, not of the King, but of Her Majesty, the Queen, the woman of his dreams.

He fell upon his knees, overcome with feeling. "Rise, monsieur le cardinal," she said abruptly. The cardinal rose to his feet and looked into her eyes. They were inscrutable. But her small mouth quivered. Her long, delicate hands were tense. For a moment the two stood in silence. The very air trembled.

Then the cardinal blurted out: "Madame, why have you tortured me! Believe my heart, each moment of waiting has been a lifetime!"

The Queen looked at him coldly. "What is this nonsense you speak, monsieur?"

Prince Louis reddened. Ah, she was being discreet. It was rash for him to have spoken so intimately in the King's own chambers.

The Queen regarded him curiously. "I have summoned you because I wish to speak to you about a certain matter."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"The jewelers Boehmer and Bassenge have been plaguing me for a payment of a first installment on a diamond necklace. They have sworn that you came to them in the role of my agent and purchased it. Now, monsieur, I demand an explanation!"

The cardinal stared at her uncomprehendingly. "But, Your Majesty, I signed the contract with your approval!"

"You are talking out of your head, monsieur!" Her eyes blazed. "I gave you no such authorization. I have not even seen this accursed necklace."

The cardinal's jaw dropped. "Your Majesty, surely you are trifling with me! Our meeting in the park, your letters to me speaking of your affection . . ."

"Cardinal, hold your tongue! You are addressing the Queen of France. Are you out of your mind?" Her little blue veins stood out throbbing in her neck. "I meet you in the park? I write you letters? I, who have not spoken a word to you in ten years! I, who have sworn to destroy you for your insults!

How can you believe that I would entrust you with such a commission?"

The cardinal put his hand to his forehead. The room seemed to spin dizzily around him. "But, madame, a terrible mistake has been made. I have with me letters bearing your signature. I have carried them around with me ever since—the meeting. Here!" He put his hand into his vest pocket and drew forth a *vignette blue.*

The Queen examined it. Then she handed it back to him contemptuously. "Fool, this is not my writing. How could you, a Rohan, a prince of the Church, believe that I would sign my name *Marie Antoinette de France!* Are you unaware of my proper signature? It is simply *Marie Antoinette.*" Her face was scarlet. "These letters are forgeries. The woman you met in the park was without doubt a prostitute. You have been swindled, you stupid, vainglorious, thickheaded dupe!"

"But, Your Majesty—the Countess de La Motte——"

"What! Are you referring to that bastard descendant of Henri III? What has that adventuress to do with this?"

"Peste!" exclaimed the cardinal after a pause. "What, then, has become of the necklace?"

"Monsieur," replied the Queen sharply, "if the countess is mixed up in this affair, I can assure you that the diamonds have been torn from their setting and are even now being sold abroad. That swindler has defrauded you!"

"She has robbed me of a million and a half francs," groaned the cardinal. "I am undone!"

As Prince Louis stood in anguish before the withering contempt of the Queen, the folding doors at the farther end of the cabinet opened, and the King entered. The dull, flabby faced monarch took only a few steps forward before the cardinal moved over to him and flung himself at his feet.

"Your Majesty," he cried almost incoherently, "I have made a frightful blunder. I—I am a ruined man. I pray God you will have compassion on me!"

Louis XVI stiffened. "Come, Cousin, pull yourself together. I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about!"

Briefly the Queen acquainted him with the story. Louis XVI remained silent for what seemed an age, his eyes fixed on the cardinal. Then he spoke. "Cousin, are you an idiot or a scoundrel?"

The cardinal rose to his feet. "I trust I am neither, Your Majesty. I am the victim of an unconscionable woman. It goes without saying that I shall assume the entire debt of the necklace. I will pay the million and a half francs down to the final sou."

The King answered the cardinal with a short, sardonic laugh. "Well, Cousin, that is excellent! You offer a million and a half francs! It is most typical of you to solve all your affairs with money." His eyes grew hard. "What of the miserable scandal you have made possible by prowling in the royal park aflame with lust! What of a woman's reputation you have bespattered —and that woman my wife!" His voice almost broke. "A million and a half francs, sir? Why, that is merely a first installment of the debt you shall pay!"

He walked over to a fluted column, pressed a button. A low, liquid bell pealed. The doors opened, and a guard appeared. "Arrest the Cardinal, Prince Louis de Rohan!"

"But, sire," burst forth the cardinal, "I protest! I have not willingly done wrong."

"You are an imbecile!" roared the King. "And for that reason alone you should be kept out of harm's way."

"But spare me at least this insult. Do not disgrace me in my robes of office. Defer my arrest at least until I have said Mass. This is the Lord's day."

The King gave him a look of profound scorn. "Yes, Cousin. And the Lord will look favorably upon the disgrace of an imposter. You are unworthy to say the Mass!" He turned to the guard. "Conduct monsieur the cardinal immediately to the Bastille."

The cardinal listened to the order without blanching. In his adversity he regained his old hauteur. His eyes flashed. His nose quivered with pride. "Sire," he replied, "I swear by my faith, you will live to curse the day you dared to imprison the Grand Almoner of France."

Without another word, he strode from the royal cabinet, accompanied by the officer. As he traversed the Gallery of Looking Glass, the entire court looked upon him with astonishment. But the cardinal walked in dignity, glancing neither to the right nor left. Down a marble stairway he proceeded, across the royal courtyard, past the chapel where he was to have presided over the Mass. The noonday sun gilded his

scarlet robes with a final caress as Prince Louis René Édouard de Rohan passed through the gates of the palace on his way to the Bastille.

Left alone, the King and the Queen contemplated one another silently. They had caused one another a great deal of suffering during their married life together; and yet, despite their difference in temperament, and all gossip to the contrary, they respected each other deeply.

After a few moments the Queen murmured, "Ah, monsieur, this trial of the cardinal will be a Roman holiday for the people. A necklace purchased for a million and a half francs, while the peasants starve for bread, while there is not enough money in the treasury to build a battleship for defense! The people will never believe my innocence, monsieur."

The King regarded her sadly for a moment and replied, "Whatever happens, my Queen, there is one who will stand by you to the end—your King!"

Marie Antoinette walked nervously over to the window. The light fell upon her beautiful chestnut hair, wreathing it in tints of autumnal fire. She clasped her fingers around her neck with a little shudder.

Immediately after the arrest of the cardinal, the details of the conspiracy were brought to light. The Countes de La Motte had engaged her lover, Rétaux de Villette, an experienced forger, to frame all the letters of the Queen to the cardinal on royal stationery the adventuress had stolen from Her Majesty, including the notorious letter of approval in accordance with which the necklace was purchased. A prostitute, Marie de Laguay, whose resemblance to the Queen was extraordinary—she had the identical hair, complexion, and features of Her Majesty—was engaged to meet the cardinal in the Versailles Park to stoke the fires of his passion and prepare him psychologically for the swindle. Except for once a year, on the Feast of the Assumption, the cardinal had not laid eyes upon the Queen for a decade. The night of the tryst was particularly cloudy. Prince Louis was completely deceived.

With a stroke of the pen the fatuous Prince Louis had pledged his resources to guarantee the purchase, then delivered the necklace into the hands of the countess, who, as the Queen afterward surmised, cut the jewels from their settings and sent her husband and other agents to dispose of them piecemeal

at fabulous prices. However, the countess didn't live to enjoy the proceeds. She was arrested, stripped naked to the waist, whipped publicly, and branded. Shortly thereafter she committed suicide.

The cardinal was absolved of all criminal intent and freed, despite the anger of the King, by Parliamentary decree. The forger, Rétaux de Villette, fled from the country. The courtesan who had posed as the Queen escaped with a light sentence.

But the one individual who suffered a martyrdom was the unfortunate Queen. Her avowals of innocence were received with skepticism by the public. Years of hostile propaganda had prepared it to believe the most salacious stories about her. Every Frenchman sat in judgment on her. It was believed that she had actually met the cardinal in the park and had carried on an affair with him; that she had really bought the necklace and ordered others to shoulder the blame.

The name of Marie Antoinette has been linked forever with this scandal. She has been branded with scarlet for a necklace she never wore.

Ten years after the events described above, a meeting of the Illuminati, a sect dedicated to undreground political activities, took place one evening in the house of one of its order in Rome. Under the blaze of chandeliers that sparkled through mirrors of Bohemian glass, a hundred and fifty men were assembled, dressed in robes of black silk and golden hoods embroidered with red hieroglyphics. There were bankers from Basle, London, and Venice; cabinet ministers whose secret doings would have horrified their monarchs; writers and influential journalists of the European press; teachers and students of philosophy from China, Arabia, and Hindustan; high-ranking army and navy officers; leading manufacturers; scientists; economists; princes of the Church—all bound by a secret oath to work unceasingly for the overthrow of kings and to establish democracy all over the world.

On the walls of the apartment in which these gentlemen had gathered, chatting in dozens of languages, were hung Gobelin tapestries so detailed as to seem the frescoes of a master painter. At regular intervals beside divans covered in sky-blue damask stood huge bronze sea serpents, with phosphorescent eyes, and jaws that exhaled the vapors of myriad perfumes. A

tremendous black altar was stationed in the center of the room on which several hundred wax tapers spelled out in letters of flame the motto of the Illuminati: *"Lilia destrue pedibus* [Trample the lilies underground]!"

Precisely at ten the company grew hushed. The portieres were opened and the Sieur de Cagliostro, the Grand Cophta of the Order, walked into the room amid a deep, reverential silence. He was dressed like the others except that from his neck hung a chain of emeralds to which were attached scarabs and multi-colored figures of the Cabala. At his side a sword with a handle shaped like a cross was suspended from a belt of velvet.

The Grand Cophta removed his hood and commenced to read his annual report of the Order, a procedure that was always followed at these conventions. He concluded with a brief informal discussion.

"Brothers, we still have unfinished business in many areas of the world. As our comrades Washington, Jefferson, and Adams who led the recent American Revolution can tell you, it is no easy matter to throw off the shackles of a king.

"There are blows to be struck in particular against the crowns of Spain, Austria, Poland, and Hungary. The Chinese people are chafing under the iron hand of the Manchus. The petty monarchs of the Germanies must be crushed without mercy. We must overthrow the Sultan of Turkey. As for the Bourbons in France . . ." He paused, and his face lit up with enthusiasm.

"Yes, yes, Master," broke in a dozen voices from the floor. "Give us the details of the cataclysm in France!"

"Well, you know, Brothers," replied the Grand Cophta, "the King and Queen have surrendered their lives on the guillotine. The nobility has been exterminated. Versailles, the Bastille, are things of the past—in accordance with my prophecies."

"We have heard, Master," remarked one hooded figure, "that the event which shook the monarchy to its foundations and hastened the revolution was the scandal of the Diamond Necklace."

"Ah, the necklace!" replied the Grand Cophta. An infinitely shrewd look came into his face. "Brothers, that is absolutely correct."

He continued craftily: "The world has heard that the Countess Jeanne de Valois-La Motte stole the necklace. But

will reveal to you the entire truth—the truth I alone know.

"It was I who implanted the scheme for the swindle in the head of the countess. The moment I laid eyes upon her I recognized in her a perfect instrument for my plans. I befriended her. I played upon her greed. I showed her the means of execution."

He frowned. "Poor, foolish woman! She couldn't see beyond her nose. To her the necklace meant a million and a half francs; to me . . ."

He paused, and his memory went back to a bitter winter afternoon in 1784. Once again he climbed the Château at Versailles; and he entered the little room so simply furnished with the harpsichord and a vase of roses. In a corner by three candles slept a little lady, her lashes suffused by the twilight.

"Sleep, my Queen," he whispered. And a tear stole into his eye.

VIDOCQ'S FINAL CASE

In 1830, during the reign of the French monarch Louis-Philippe, a series of robberies startled all Paris by their daring. The apartment of General Bourdonnais, Marshal of France, was broken into while the general was sleeping away the effects of a banquet. All his uniforms, his medals, a large sum of money were seized. He was left naked and furious, with only a bottle of burgundy that had been overlooked. A few nights later thieves broke into the museum of the Petit Palais Royal and carried off a highly valuable gilt-framed mirror, several fabulously priced Sèvres vases, and a collection of antique silverware. Then scarcely had the authorities recovered from this shock when the holy of holies was successfully invaded—the Prefecture of Police!

This robbery was the height of insolence. One morning, when the chief of detectives and several of his aides left Paris for business in Rouen, three men dressed in the uniforms of police magistrates drove up to the gates of the Prefecture. The guard not only permitted them to enter but supplied them with a detail of three gendarmes upon request. Then the pseudo magistrates walked down the passageway leading to the depot where a vast quantity of stolen jewelry—necklaces, watches, bracelets—seized by the police were stored pending the arrival of their owners. Ordering their detail to stand guard against any intrusion while they carried out "official business," they entered the depot and helped themselves to a dozen cabinets filled with the stolen goods. Explaining to the police that they were transporting these cabinets for an investigation, they actually received help from the gendarmes in carrying them to the waiting vehicle. Then, before anyone at the bureau was the wiser, they drove off. Their haul was valued at hundreds of thousands of francs.

When Paris discovered how the Sûreté had been hoodwinked,

the commissioner and his detectives became the butt of unprecedented ridicule. Red-faced with fury, *monsieur le commissaire de police* vowed that he would catch the criminals if it were his last official act. *Peste!* He was determined to vindicate himself.

Thorough investigation established the probability that the thieves responsible for the robbery of the police bureau belonged to the same gang as those who had entered the apartment of General Bourdonnais and had plundered the royal museum. It was further suspected that one or more of the criminals were foreigners, probably Englishmen. As a result Scotland Yard was invited to send over an inspector to help in the investigation.

That was how I, Jimmy Williams, happened to become associated with this case. I was a junior inspector still feeling my way. I grumbled a great deal to my wife—rather foolishly, I confess—about my slow advancement; about how my abilities were not being sufficiently recognized. The truth is I had yet to win my spurs, and I prayed for a case which would make my reputation at a stroke. One morning the chief called me into his office.

"Williams," he said. "The devil is being raised in Paris. A gang of housebreakers has made monkeys of the Sûreté. The French suspect that at least one of the criminals is English. And they are asking me to send a man over. Would you like to look into the affair?"

I fairly jumped at the opportunity. That afternoon I packed my bags. The following day I crossed the Channel to Normandy and reserved a diligence for Paris.

The coach had not traveled many miles when it met with a minor accident outside the village of St. Lô, and the journey was halted while it underwent repairs. I found myself with an hour or so on my hands, and after a lunch at an inn I took a ramble in the rolling fields, amid the apple trees which are the glory of this region.

Eventually I came to a clearing beyond a hedgerow where a group of farmers were gathered around a show booth draped with curtains, on one side of which was painted the sign *Théâtre de Variétés.* One would imagine that many traveling variety shows had appeared in St. Lô within the life span of these inhabitants. Yet there was an air of anticipation, a tone

of excitement that suggested the audience was expecting more than the routine of this one. I asked a peasant near me who were these show people who commanded such enthusiasm.

"Why, there is only one," the fellow replied. "He is Monsieur Vidocq, who was formerly chief of the Paris police. He was a terror to criminals. *Eh bien!* Is it possible you have not heard of Vidocq?"

"It seems to me I have heard the name somewhere," I confessed. "He had, I believe, an extraordinary career."

"Extraordinary. *Pardieu!* That is hardly the word for it. But stay around and see for yourself."

Within a few minutes a tall individual in silk knee breeches and shoes with silver buckles, from whose ears dangled rings of gold, emerged from the curtains. His eyes were as black as mountain tarns; his nose aquiline; his jaw firm. He acknowledged the applause with a bow and held up a huge, hairy hand for silence. There was something incongruous about the scene. I had the feeling that this man seemed completely out of place amid the apple trees, under this quiet country sky.

"Messieurs," Vidocq announced in even, musical tones, "it will give me infinite pleasure to act out the highlights of my career before you." He clapped his hands twice and a frail fellow with a delicate face emerged from the curtains. "I take pride in introducing the man who ably assists me in my performance, Monsieur LeBac."

The assistant acknowledged the mild applause with a strained bow and a twitch of the head which I put down to a nervous disorder.

Then the show began. Vidocq received from his assistant the fascinating souvenirs of his most memorable man hunts; and amid the "ohs" and "ahs" of the multitude, he held them up dramatically one by one. Here were the every shoes worn by the Rouen brigand Cartouche, who went to country fairs, spied out the merchants whose pockets overflowed with money, and murdered them on their way home. Here were the false keys with which the celebrated housebreaker, La Rousse, unlocked the apartments of the wealthiest widows in Le Mans. Here was the rope on which the forger Poyant hanged himself at the home of his mistress seconds before Vidocq arrived to arrest him. Here was the crucifix Raoul, the mother-murderer, called for in his death cell upon being seized with a religious frenzy.

As Vidocq held up each exhibit, his features sparkled with abnormal excitement. He seemed like a high priest enraptured over sacred mysteries. And before him the peasants were enthralled.

Upon concluding this phase of the performance, Vidocq changed into some of the character disguises in which he had made his spectacular arrests. No other quick-change artist I have ever witnessed was his peer. He disappeared behind the curtains, and within a few moments he emerged, not as the portly gentleman in silk and buckles, but as an elderly, diminutive cripple with dust-stained countenance, who seemed as old as the world. Then with a laugh this cripple opened his cloak and revealed to the audience how his left arm was strapped against his chest, pointed to the bundle of cloth that had been used as a stump. He called for a basin of water, rinsed the pomade from his head, and disappeared again behind the drapes. Within a matter of minutes a convict in iron chains materialized so suddenly as to throw the crowd into a paroxysm of terror. No sooner did the criminal disappear than out walked a Carmelite friar whose countenance shone with saintliness. This was followed in short order by a coal miner; and apache from Marseilles; an elderly, dissolute marquis; the madam of a brothel; a lieutenant of Chasseurs; a middle-aged governess—and, finally, to the thunder of cheers, Vidocq himself, the master of disguise, impeccably dressed in silk. As Vidocq bowed in acknowledgment of the applause, I couldn't help noting that his face was twisted in a cynical smile.

I glanced at my watch and discovered that my hour of leisure was over. I headed for the village square and reached the diligence barely in time to take my seat.

All the way to Paris I speculated about Vidocq. I was intensely curious to know more concerning him. I wondered what combination of circumstances had reduced the former chief of police to playing clown detective in a traveling show. This was certainly a bizarre ending to his career.

The following morning I arrived in Paris. Within a few hours I reported to Monsieur Doubigny, the police commissioner. I took part in endless conferences and continual questioning of witnesses. Periodically the Sûreté made a statement to the press exhorting the public to exercise patience. This was politic advice. No immediate break in the case seemed in sight.

Then one morning, the seventh of my stay in Paris, as I walked into the office of the commissioner, I found him closeted with a visitor. A thrill shot through me as the face of the newcomer turned toward me. There was no mistaking this man with the tar-colored eyes, under bushy gray brows, the cynical mouth that seemed to grimace even in repose. It was Vidocq. It was the showman of the fields, dressed neatly, unobtrusively, like thousands of others in business attire. Yet standing here he seemed incongruous, as out of place in an office as in the fields.

The commissioner placed his hands over his capacious stomach with an air of satisfaction, as if he were exhibiting a prize animal he had bagged at the risk of his life. "Monsieur Williams," he announced, "allow me to present my predecessor in this office, Monsieur Vidocq. I have called him in to help us unravel these robberies."

Vidocq bowed. At close range I was more than ever struck by the uncanny vitality of his features. It was impossible to fix his age. I had half an impulse to congratulate him on his exciting performance at St. Lô, but I checked myself. Perhaps Vidocq did not want his extraordinary career in the hinterlands discussed in the commissioner's office.

"Monsieur Vidocq and I have been discussing a significant angle of these robberies," explained the commissioner. "Sit down, Monsieur Williams, and we shall summarize our conclusions for you."

We sat down, Monsieur Doubigny carefully lowering his belly and leaning forward with flabby hands cupped. Vidocq gave me a glance of quick appraisal and then tilted back in his chair, resting his gaze upon a pine-wood rack from which hung an assortment of firearms.

The commissioner blew his nose with emphasis. "As you know, messieurs, we have established to our satisfaction that the robberies were carried out by a single gang. The features of the crimes are exceedingly *outré,* amazingly suggestive of the personality of the executors. For one thing, consider the impudence of thieves who break into our national museum and decamp with a celebrated collection of vases, silverware, and other furnishings. These stolen treasures cannot be of any profit unless they are so disguised in appearance as to hoodwink not only the police but collectors as well.

"Now there exist in the underworld of Paris several antique shops who employ workmen of the highest order. From time to time they receive stolen furnishings, and they alter them in appearance to the point where they can be resold with a minimum risk of detection. We have kept a strict watch on these shops, but thus far we have been unable to trace the plunder of the Petit Palais Royal through them. Who knows? Perhaps the thieves have already managed to smuggle these furnishings across our border to a country thousands of miles away, to India, for instance, where they will be retouched at leisure and sold to a maharaja.

"But what manner of thieves have the connections to make such an art coup feasible? Certainly not the small-time housebreaker. No, messieurs, only the gentleman thief. The man who is at home in the world of art museums and galleries. The man who dines intimately with a countess, his potential customer. In short, the consummate imposter!"

Monsieur Doubigny paused. Vidocq's gaze reverted from the rack of firearms to the commissioner's cravat. At a nod from the other, he took up the thread of the discourse, speaking in a musical inflection with frequent, pungent gestures.

"I do not know the answer to these crimes, but I have been pursuing a logical lead. Gentlemen thieves have the fierce pride of artists. They are a small, tightly knit professional group, each member of which knows everything there is to know about his colleagues. Furthermore, each, possessed as he is of the genuine artistic temperament, is always insanely jealous of the exploits of his fellows. At the drop of a hat, he will preach to the authorities.

"Now there is a gentleman in Paris who answers to my description perfectly. I am willing to wager that even if he himself is not involved in these robberies, he can lead us to the guilty ones."

Vidocq took a pinch of snuff. "In the old days I knew the Marquis du Villiers very well. He wasn't really a marquis. But he gained entree into the greatest houses with such ease, his friends nicknamed him 'Monsieur Latchkey.' He was a dandy, fanatically proud of his beautiful hands. When the law finally caught up with him, and he was sent to prison, an admirer bought him a magnificent dressing case containing all the articles of the toilet. 'Monsieur Latchkey' bribed the jailer and

consumed an hour a day dressing. He strutted about like a popinjay. His cell reeked of perfume.

"Well, this fellow had a career of ups and downs. But even when he found himself in the chain gang, he preserved his *grand-salon hauteur.* He served his sentence like a philosopher and now he is free for new adventures. Knowing human nature as I do, I am certain he will roam through the fashionable world again, risking his head for the crown jewels. And the very ladies who were robbed by him will succumb once more to his embraces. You can understand that, particularly after these robberies, I have been burning with curiosity to renew my acquaintanceship with the marquis. For the past seven days I have sniffed everywhere for a scent of him."

"Ah," interjected the commissioner. "He is in hiding?"

"Naturally," replied Vidocq. "I have been forced to the conclusion that he is lying low. I have assumed all my character disguises. I have visited the fashionable cafés, the art galleries, the music halls, the race tracks, the Exchange. I have even called upon certain women of the Faubourg St. Germaine whose appetite for a liaison is as large as their income. But at none of these places had I been able to discover the whereabouts of the marquis—that is, until late last night!"

Vidocq drummed his fingers emphatically on the commissioner's desk. "You know, although the marquis rubs shoulders with the *haute noblesse,* he has not been averse to recruiting ruffians for business that is too foul for his own gorge. From time to time in the past he has visited a certain underworld café to meet with these faithful followers. Only hours ago I discovered through an underworld contact that the marquis is once more recruiting his knifemen. For the past few days he has been haunting the Café de la Tour, in the Rue St. Antoine and he will visit there tonight."

A showman to the marrow of his bones, Vidocq savored the effect of his dramatic announcement. After a moment he rose from his seat and looked at me quizzically. "Monsieur William, would you enjoy making the acquitance of the marquis?"

"Of course."

"Fine. I imagine there will be fireworks tonight. Let's meet in the Luxembourg at ten in the evening, and together we'll descend upon the Café de la Tour."

We decided to dress for our excursion in the character of

French sailors out for a fling. With the help of Sûreté make-up experts, I assumed the role; and I met Vidocq in the Luxembourg promptly at ten.

We crossed the gardens and entered the winding, evil-smelling Bohemian quarter. The streets were deserted. The night was heavy and starless. Occasionally the song of a drunk or an outburst of laughter and cursing reached our ears from the half-opened windows of the slum dwellings. The moaning of a cat sounded curiously like a woman strangling. It sent a chill through me.

We turned into the Rue St. Antoine. Vidocq put pressure on my arm as we halted in front of a down-at-the-heels *épicerie*. We descended a flight of stairs to a basement entrance. Vidocq knocked sharply. There was a shuffle of feet. The door was opened by a scrofulous old half-caste with close-set, rheumy eyes and a complexion like decayed leather. Vidocq spoke a few words to her in an undertone, and she ushered us into the Café de la Tour.

The café was small, damp-smelling, and ill-lit, like the hold of a ship. The walls were blackened with soot. At tables which had not been wiped off from one dinner to the next a company of cutthroats, pickpockets, prostitutes sat drinking gin and dining off "beef à la mode" from dogs found dead on the marshes. Pipes passed from mouth to mouth. The women as well as men chewed tobacco.

In an alcove up front an orchestra, consisting of two clarinets, a trumpet, a hurdy-gurdy, and a bassoon, wheezed out a dreary tune under the direction of a cripple with a nose like a rotten strawberry.

As we passed to a table, Vidocq took a pinch of snuff from a large common bowl on the counter. He emitted a massive sneeze and carefully wiped his eyes. Then he singled out the half-breed who had admitted us and motioned to her to come over.

"You are expecting monsieur the marquis tonight, madame?"

The old dame gave him a suspicious look. "Who are you?"

"My friend and I are sailors. We have business with the Marquis."

The old woman put her hands on her hips and said abruptly, "He will be here at eleven."

"Ah," replied Vidocq, glancing at his watch. "We are early. Let's have drinks."

After the old lady had brought the drinks and left us, Vidocq glanced around the room. "Places like these," he declared, "are the unwashed linen that Paris hides from the tourist. Some of these wretches had to fall pretty far to reach the sewer. See that whore over there?" He indicated a middle-aged female with streaky hair. "Would you believe that Madame Garnier was formerly a great beauty? She was the mistress of a Russian ambassador who kept her in luxury on a hundred thousand crowns a year. Today you can buy her for a glass of gin.

"And over there, *peste!* Mademoiselle Adèle." I followed his glance and saw an elephantine woman whose glandular abnormalities had exaggerated her breasts and hips and fatty flesh to the point where they excited ridicule.

"Would you believe that only ten years ago she could have been the model for a Raphael Madonna? Adèle had a weakness for a special class of criminals. From a string of lovers she learned how to make false keys, and she became a veritable virtuoso at housebreaking. *Mordieu,* but she was loyal! Whenever one of her lovers went off to prison, she replaced him with his closest comrade."

The low, flickering light from the candles threw shadows on Vidocq's face that grotesquely accentuated his features. For an instant it was as though Harlequin had been transformed into a smiling Mephistopheles. He seemed taller than ever; his fingers tapered almost to a point.

"Do you know, Monsieur Williams, I feel at home with these criminals. I am one of them." Suddenly he plucked at the buttons of his blouse. He opened it and bared a section of his midriff. Burned into his flesh with a brand were the initials *GAL*—the mark of the chain-gang convict!

Vidocq looked at me shrewdly. "You didn't know that I was a chain-gang convict?"

I nodded my head in the negative.

"Ah, you are shocked?" A subtle note of arrogance crept into his voice. He drained his glass and called for another. "Withhold your judgment, monsieur, and while we await the marquis, I shall tell you how I was rewarded with this branding." He settled back in his seat; a malicious little look played about his lips.

"Where shall I begin? *Allons!* At the beginning. I was the son of a baker in Lille. Before I was twelve, I had stolen everything I could get my hands upon. I even robbed my mother. One evening I sent a friend of mine to tell my parents that I was involved in a barroom fracas at the other end of town, and that they had better come quickly to prevent my going to jail.

"My parents fell for the ruse. The coast was clear. I let myself into my mother's bedroom. I forced open the chest with a crowbar and helped myself to the money. Within a few minutes I was on the road to Arras.

"I knocked about from town to town doing odd jobs. Then one morning I met a fellow and his wife who ran a Punch-and-Judy show. They invited me to join them. The wife was a lovely brunette. She was only sixteen. Her husband was a great deal older. 'You can help Elisa with the puppets while I take up the collections in front,' he suggested. I was only too happy to oblige. During the first few performances Elisa gave me a hundred provocative glances, and finally she confessed a passion for me. For a short while we were ideally happy.

"But alas, Monsieur Williams, one Sunday afternoon the blow fell! The performance had gone off excellently. Polichinelle, the puppet, had knocked down all his adversaries. The audience was ready to disperse. But suddenly the husband, who was out front collecting receipts, came backstage and found Elisa and me in an embrace. He plunged the hook of a puppet into her eye. I hurled myself upon him, overturning the booth and exposing ourselves to the audience. We kicked and punched and wrestled to irreverent hoots.

"Need I add that I found myself in the streets again?

"And so it went. One month I joined up with a peddler selling quack nostrums; the next, I had an affair with a traveling comedienne. Yes, I turned into a first-class adventurer."

Vidocq drained his glass and continued. "So far, although I had broken most of the Ten Commandments, I hadn't as yet landed in jail. Now my luck changed. I had an affair with a streetwalker. One evening I caught her with an army captain. I gave him a whipping. He preferred charges. I was put into prison. A group of prisoners plotted to free one of their number by forging the signature of the prison commandant on an order for his release. But the forgery was nipped in the bud. An investigation was launched. And the ringleaders, who bore me

animosity, had the impudence to name me as an accomplice. I protested my innocence—in vain. Together with the guilty parties, I was sentenced to eight years."

Vidocq paused, and the tips of his fingers curled. "I swore I would never serve out my sentence. I didn't.

"Once when I was summoned to the magistrate's office with a group of other prisoners for questioning, a gendarme carelessly placed his hat and coat on a table near me. Taking advantage of the momentary confusion that existed while the column of prisoners entered the room, I seized the gendarme's hat, wrapped myself in his coat, and, grabbing the arm of a convict next to me, I escorted him down a corridor to a gate. The corporal of the guard, believing I was conducting the prisoner on official business, opened the gate with a salute; and the two of us were free!

"However, we were rounded up again in a matter of hours. I made several other breaks from jail, and on every occasion I was captured. Each escape only increased my punishment. People commenced to consider me a dangerous prisoner. Everywhere I was spoken of as 'that scoundrel Vidocq.' Eventually the judges, determined that I should never again break free, sentenced me to a prison where I was bound twenty-four hours a day—the chain gang!

"Ah, monsieur, you do not know the Bagne at Brest! It is the hell of all prisons. The most abandoned killer, when he passes through its gates, blanches with horror. But even the chain gang couldn't hold me. I escaped.

"My method was simple. I faked an illness, raising a fever by swallowing several pipefuls of tobacco. And I was sent to the prison hospital. I struck up a friendship with one of the hospital nuns who nursed me. Dear, honest Sister Françoise! I bribed a hospital guard, an ex-convict, to steal her clothes for me early one morning while everyone was asleep. I slipped into her dress, adjusted the veil; and with a prayer book under my arm, I walked out of the hospital. I crossed the courtyard and reached a place where the wall was the easiest to scale. By sunrise, despite the embarrassment of my skirts, I managed to put a respectable distance between the prison and myself.

"This time I wasn't caught. I remained a fugitive from justice, living from hand to mouth. I joined a crew of smugglers. Then I enlisted on a privateer and took part in engage-

ments against the English. For a time I even set myself up as a shopkeeper.

"I made a tremendous effort to destroy the past. But it was no use. Every moment of my freedom was torture. Do you realize, monsieur, how it is to live every hour expecting a return to the chain gang? As the years passed I would have given anything to have been able to quit this existence of tension. I yearned to walk in the sun."

Vidocq wet his lips, and his large liquid eyes suddenly narrowed. "And suddenly, monsieur, I was struck with an idea. It was simple enough. Instead of exhausting my energy hiding from the police, I decided to join them. I decided to walk right into the lion's den with a proposition that would not be refused. Ah, you laugh at my impudence! But, *mon ami,* what was more logical?"

That subtle, cynical look played around Vidocq's lips. "Consider, Monsieur Williams, I was the notorious Vidocq. There was not a trick of the crime trade I didn't know. In twenty years of hiding from the law, I had become an underworld celebrity of the first water. Suppose I were to draw upon my experience and solve crimes for the police in return for a guarantee that I would never be sent back to the chain gang?

"It happened that Paris was in the grip of a major crime wave. A series of robberies had infuriated the public. The police were at their wit's end. I wrote a letter from my hide-out to Monsieur Henry, the commissioner of police, offering my services for a pardon.

"Monsieur Henry was a cool bird. He weighed my proposition from every angle. And then he sent his gendarmes for me. I surrendered myself and appeared before him in handcuffs. I had taken a tremendous risk. But, *mon ami,* I am an excellent judge of human nature."

"'*Pardieu,* Vidocq!' exclaimed Monsieur Henry. 'For years we have been hunting you. And now you appear out of thin air to make me an impudent offer!' He pointed a finger for emphasis. '*Eh bien,* I have the audacity to accept!'

"My face must have registered relief, for he continued. 'But wait, *mon ami,* the situation is not as pleasant as it sounds. You are pardoned—but only provisionally. You will remain at freedom only as long as you can demonstrate your worth. And I guarantee that you will sweat to earn every hour!'

"'I had no illusions on that score, monsieur le commissaire!'

"'But listen!' continued Monsieur Henry. 'Each month I will present you with the minimum quota of criminals you will be required to bring to justice during the following thirty days. If on any month you fail to make this quota of arrests—mind you, any single month'—he paused with an expressive gesture—'it's back to the chain gang with you!'

"'Monsieur le commissaire,' I replied, mustering some gaiety, 'You are placing me in the position of Scheherazade, who had to fabricate a story each evening to keep her head. Well, I have no alternative but to accept.'

"And so," continued Vidocq wryly, "I joined the police on the installment plan. The sword of Damocles really hung over me. Since it was essential that I should continue to appear before my ex-comrades in the role of an outlaw, Monsieur Henry arrested me with a great deal of publicity and then permitted me to escape while I was being transported to prison.

"And now I became involved in a double life that defies all fiction. I spent my waking hours frequenting the haunts of the underworld, the Cafés de La Courtille, du Combat, de Ménilmontant, appearing in one disguise after another, exactly as though I were a fugitive from justice. All the criminals I contacted would have sworn I was one of them. Many were my personal friends from prison. They confided to me every secret, invited me to share 'jobs' with them. Indeed, no crime had been committed or was about to be committed about which I did not quickly learn the details!

"However, I had to proceed carefully with my arrests. I would accept an invitation to take part in a robbery and, upon quietly tipping off the gendarmes, I would be seized along with my confederates on the very scene of the crime. I would be thrown into prison along with them and put through severe questioning. None of them had the slightest idea that it was I who had brought about their downfall.

"You can imagine that the underworld was shaken to its foundations. Veteran criminals shook their heads in bewilderment. The police, only yesterday an inefficient, bungling outfit, turned overnight into a thousand eyes. They were everywhere. Not a crime was launched but they swooped down upon the scene. One escaped convict after another was hauled out of his hide-out. 'Respectable' fences who for years had escaped

detection were suddenly seized with the goods. No evildoer was safe any longer. But how could these wretches understand what really had happened? Monsieur Vidocq was successfully paying his installments!

"The commissioner and I became fast friends. I was indispensable to him. Day and night we were closeted until the crime wave became a little bubble!"

Vidocq paused and took a pinch of snuff. "Monsieur Williams, the rest of my tale is brief. I not only didn't go back to the chain gang. I was made chief of the Sûreté, the force of detectives! By now my fame had risen to such proportions that it was no longer easy for me to deceive criminals in my role of spy. However, I still came among them in various disguises and continued to entrap them.

"I may say, without boasting, that during my term as chief of the Sûreté my methods of deduction became standard with police everywhere. I introduced science into a field where hitherto only conjecture had existed. In a single year I arrested seven hundred and seventy-two criminals! And in eighteen years I brought more than twenty thousand to justice.

"Yes, you can see I definitely earned my pardon—and a tidy little competence beside. Fifteen years after being appointed chief of the Sûreté, I retired. But my story does not end here."

Vidocq fingered his wineglass. "I who had spent eighteen years tracking down criminals now invested my entire savings in them. Knowing how hard it was to live down a criminal past, I provided ex-convicts with the means of earning a decent living. I put my money into paper mills, hiring only men and women who had been pardoned for their crimes. I thought it was a sound venture. But it failed utterly. The prejudiced public refused to buy goods made by former criminals. My machines were compelled to stop. Within a year I was a poor man, as penniless at fifty as I had been on the day I escaped from the chain gang.

"During the last couple of years, to keep my bones together I have been forced to organize a show and tour the provinces, exhibiting my tricks as a detective.

"Such is my story. I have no apologies. I have served France well."

Vidocq placed his hands on the table and looked at me squarely for an appraisal.

"It's an extraordinary story," I remarked. "Your countryman, Molière, could have created a sparkling drama out of it."

"Yes," Vidocq replied. "*Eh bien*, let us attend to the marquis."

While Vidocq had been proceeding with his narrative, a stream of new arrivals had filled the café to capacity. The fumes of alcohol, the stench of many a stale ragout almost turned my stomach.

At the counter a huge bull of a waiter stood like Cerberus, on guard against disorder. Vidocq returned his glance unflinchingly and then swept his eyes around the room.

A satanic peal of laughter suddenly burst from one of the nearby tables where three burly men and two red-eyed tarts were getting drunker by the minute. Then one of the men broke into an obscene song at the top of his lungs, singing miserably off key and choking on the words. One of the women jerked herself off the lap of her escort and went into an improvised dance. All the other patrons turned and watched her. A few stamped their feet in rhythmic accompaniment.

The scrofulous old woman who had ushered us into the café leered from behind the counter.

The streetwalker was an undersized girl with a pale, drawn, somewhat ugly face. But, consumed with the fire of her rhythms, she seemed like a primitive young goddess. All her agony, frustration, defiance of life, were transmuted into the writhings of her body, the frenzied, rhapsodic gestures of her arms and legs. With a breath-taking spin she flung herself to the ground and suddenly drew herself up on her knees, like a suppliant soul pleading for a new rebirth. Then she rose to her full, pitifully small stature; and in the very middle of a gesture, she ceased to move. It was as though the abnormal energy which had carried her along so far had suddenly failed her. She settled wearily on her heels and retreated to the lap of her ruffian lover.

I glanced at Vidocq. His eyes, like everyone else's, had been registering frank excitement. Suddenly, however, they snapped quickly, and a new expression entered them. They were fixed upon the entrance to the café. A slightly built fellow, with a complexion as delicate as a woman's, had entered and made his way to a table next to us that had been emptied of its occupants.

Vidocq put pressure on my arm. "It is the Marquis du Villiers."

I gave the newcomer a sidelong look. He called for a bottle of burgundy, wiped his lips, and, whipping out a deck of cards, commenced to play a desultory game. Occasionally he darted glances around the room. There was something feline about his movements. He had a peculiar nervous twitch to his head. His skin was as white as a schoolgirl's. His nose was small, delicately arched. Only his full, sensual lips betrayed the aggressive appetite that smoldered within him. His small, amber-hued eyes had the typical expression of the drug addict. I had a feeling I had seen him before.

Vidocq suddenly rose. "Come, we are going home," he said.

Home, when the marquis had arrived! I couldn't understand him.

He took my arm and steered me across the room to the entrance of the café. As we passed the counter the massive waiter rasped, "Gentlemen, you have not paid for your drinks!"

Vidocq halted and looked at him with surprise. *"Peste!* You are mistaken. I have paid."

"No, I am not mistaken."

Vidocq gave a characteristic shrug of the shoulders. "Well, let us return to the table and settle this."

We turned and made our way back to the table. The marquis looked up from his card game with a scowl as Vidocq brushed his foot. When he reached his seat, Vidocq made no effort to settle the bill. Instead he turned upon the waitor in anger. I wasn't going to argue this out with you in front of the whole café. Here, we can settle this matter."

"Monsieur," replied the huge fellow apologetically, "you have been drinking all evening, and I am certain that you haven't paid."

For answer. Vidocq brought the palm of his hand across the waiter's cheek. The action was so sudden and uncalled for that I thought Vidocq had gone out of his mind. For an instant the waiter reared up as though he had been knifed. Then, with a tremendous oath, he hurled himself upon Vidocq—all two hundred and thirty pounds of him. But the detective deftly side-stepped the assault. He seized a solid oak chair and thrust it between him and his adversary. The waiter, his veins standing out like whipcords, snatched up an emtpy bottle of gin and rifled it at Vidocq. It missed him by a wide margin, crashing against a table in the rear at which sat the dancing street-

walker and her friends. The glass broke into a shower of splinters. Several sliced the little prostitute's cheek and drew ribbons of blood. More in anger than in pain, she leaped to her feet shrieking, *"Nom du chien!"*

Instantly the place was thrown into an uproar. Men knocked over tables like ninepins in their haste to hurl themselves into the melee. One drunk wrenched a brace of candles from their sconces and almost set fire to himself. Women on the verge of passing out under their seats wiped away the spittle and fought with the fury of cocks. The marquis, who had been unfortunate enough to be stationed in the very center of the action, buckled under a tide of swinging fists. But, catching his second wind, he gave an excellent account of himself with the aid of an expertly guided stiletto. And, in the center of it all, the intoxicated little prostitute plunged into a frenzied, lascivious dance, wailing, *"Nom du chien!"*

Suddenly a police whistle pierced the air. A dozen gendarmes rushed into the café. Swinging their clubs like bamboo switches, they plunged into the very center of the rioting. Gradually they restored order.

"Attention!" barked the officer in charge when the entire company had been lined up against the walls. "Who is responsible for this?"

The waiter stepped forward to the spot where Vidocq and I stood doctoring a few nasty cuts. Beside us the marquis, his stiletto returned to its concealed pocket, was standing, the very picture of outraged innocence.

The waiter had the look of a Saint Bernard whose throat had just been cut by its master. "This fellow started it," he bellowed, pointing to Vidocq. "He tried to cheat me on the bill!"

With three strides the officer reached us. He signaled to a gendarme. "Arrest these three!"

"But, monsieur," exploded the marquis, "I had nothing to do with this business!" His head twitched in its peculiar fashion.

The officer's eyes met Vidocq's in a split-second exchange of understanding. "Arrest them," he repeated.

The gendarmes seized us roughly and pushed us through the door.

Afterward I learned that Vidocq had surrounded the café with gendarmes before meeting me in the Luxembourg. He

had plotted the riot and our subsequent arrest along with the marquis for a distinct purpose. The most intimate secrets are passed among jailbirds in the same cell. "Confinement is a wonderful laxative for the tongue," Vidocq was fond of declaring. He was placed in the identical cell with the marquis, underwent the same rough treatment and questioning. Within seventy-two hours such an intimate bond had grown up between these two malefactors that, under Vidocq's skillful handling, the marquis, who was not himself implicated, divulged "in the strictest confidence" the identity of the thieves who had broken into the home of General Bourdonnais, the Petit Palais Royal, the headquarters of the police.

One squad of police seized them in their hide-outs. A second raided the residence of the fence who had handled the stolen goods.

One of the gang, as the police had surmised, proved to be an English housebreaker who had escaped from Dartmoor. I identified him, having seen him a score of times at the Old Bailey.

Within a week after the arrests all the stolen articles had been recovered, with the exception of the gilt-framed mirror snatched from the Petit Palais Royal.

There was no further reason for me to remain in Paris. On the final morning of my stay, as I came out of the guardroom where prisoners were taken for questioning, I chanced upon Vidocq. "I'm leaving for London," I announced. "I want to congratulate you. Your handling of this case has been a revelation to me."

He blushed like a child. "If I'm not mistaken, those crooks will not resume their trade quickly, eh?"

I drew a pipe from my pocket and lit it. "Monsieur, may a junior inspector make a slight criticism of his teacher?"

"What is that?"

"You've smashed the gang, the four henchmen and the thieves. But you have overlooked the man who instigated these robberies, who gave the orders these small fry carried out."

"Monsieur, you astonish me. Who is this brain?"

I paused. "I have a little surprise for you. I have found this man. He awaits our judgment in the guardroom. Come with me."

"But certainly."

Vidocq was thoroughly baffled.

I took him by the arm. Together we mounted the stairs and walked down a corridor leading to the guardroom. I opened the door. We entered. The room was empty. A few feet opposite us on a wall hung a brilliantly polished mirror in a frame of mahogany.

"Mordieu!" uttered Vidocq impulsively. "It is the mirror of the Petit Palais Royal. It has been recovered, then?"

He looked about suspiciously. "The room is empty but for us. Where is your man?"

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and put it into my pocket.

"You, Vidocq!"

For a split second his jaw trembled. Then he passed his tongue carefully over his lips and fingered his cravat.

"Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy, Vidocq. I'm not crazy at all!"

"But this is fantastic——" Suddenly his countenance brightened. "Ah, it is a practical joke you are playing! *Prima!*"

For answer, the barrel of my revolver looked squarely into his face.

"You are the one who has played the joke, Vidocq—not I," I said quietly. "You masterminded these robberies. You bluffed the entire nation. No actor could have done a finer job in a very difficult role. . . . It's a pity I have penetrated your make-up!"

He stood without saying a word, a look of amazed disbelief on his face. With my free hand I pressed a button near me. Within a few seconds two gendarmes appeared.

"Arrest Monsieur Vidocq."

Without betraying the slightest emotion, the gendarmes walked over to him and searched him. He offered no resistance.

"Now, Vidocq, let me reconstruct what really happened," I declared, pacing back and forth with my hands pressed behind me. "You are a man over fifty, penniless. You have lost your life's savings in a business for ex-convicts. You have fallen out of favor with the public for employing ex-criminals in your factory. The police commissioner, sensitive to public opinion, has refused to take you back on the force. No job is open to you. You are forced to exhibit yourself in a show for a hand-to-mouth living.

"Suddenly you are seized with an idea. Thirty years ago,

when you were a fugitive from the chain gang, it was a major crime wave in Paris that gave you the opportunity to join the police and embark on your fabulous career as a detective. Why not again? However, a man can't wait for business to fall into his lap. The devil helps those who help themselves. This appeals to your particular brand of ethics. You decide to *plot a series of robberies yourself*—robberies so baffling that the police, forgetting their prejudice, will be forced to call upon one man above all to undertake the solution. Vidocq!

"Does this sound fantastic? It worked. The robbery of a high-ranking general, a national museum, the police headquarters, raised such a hue and cry that the police commissioner implored you to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. You did. You solved the case, indeed! Without batting an eye, you tracked down and turned over to the Sûreté your own henchmen, who did the dirty business. You weren't afraid of their spilling the beans on you. For years thieves had been accusing you of being in partnership with them. It was their way of wreaking vengeance on an ex-comrade for going over to the Sûreté. Long ago the police had turned a deaf ear to these stories. Why, then, should they believe the latest charges? Why, too, should your conscience bother you! You had staged a tremendous comeback. You had won the undying gratitude of the public and the police commissioner. You were once more in line for a high job with the Sûreté.

"There was only one fly in the ointment. I accidentally found out the truth. How did I discover it? Remember the Marquis du Villiers? He has a peculiar nervous twitch. While I was traveling to Paris my stagecoach broke down at St. Lô. I happened to see your show in the fields, Vidocq. I noticed that the man who assisted you with the properties jerked his head in the identical fashion of the marquis. The coincidence was extraordinary. From then on it was easy. I knew that the meeting in the café was a fake, that your entire efforts toward solving this case were fraudulent. You were my man.

"However, to be absolutely sure, I made the ultimate test. I prepared a little trap for you—a trap made possible by the sudden recovery this morning of the last piece of stolen property from the Petit Palais Royal museum—the mirror. I knew you had not yet been given the news. I persuaded the commissioner, without divulging my reasons, to keep this recovery

a secret, swearing the two gendarmes who had found the mirror to silence. I had it brought into this guardroom and hung upon the wall. Then, Vidocq, I invited you here on the outside chance that you would rise for the bait. You did. The moment you passed through the door you recognized it as the stolen mirror.

"I take it for granted that you are a museumgoer; that, however, you do not have the divination of an art expert. How, by stepping into this room and glancing casually at this mirror, did you immediately recognize it as the one stolen from the Petit Palais Royal, inasmuch as *it is not now encased in its original gilt frame, but in a frame of black mahogany, which has altered its appearance out of all recognition?* How, unless you yourself were involved with the thieves who expropriated and reframed it? You spoke out impulsively. Yes, Vidocq, even a master nods. I said before that Molière could have created a fine drama out of your life. I might have added—a comedy in the tradition of Tartuffe, the hypocrite."

For a few moments after I had ceased to speak Vidocq remained silent. He regarded me with that peculiarly malicious twinkle in his eye which I had so often found disturbing. Once again he seemed to be sitting opposite me in the Café de la Tour, taking a brief respite from his narration of how he had defied the world. Then he rose from his chair and spoke, in the quiet, indulgent tone of a father addressing a child:

"Bravo, Monsieur Williams—all this is very interesting. Extremely interesting. Unfortunately, it is all untrue. . . . These so-called proofs of yours are utter nonsense, the figments of a desperate imagination." His eyes narrowed. "At the proper time and before the proper tribunal I shall expose you, Monsieur Williams, for what you are—an unmitigated fabricator. As for the present, *au revoir*—and pleasant dreams!"

He bowed deeply and, accompanied by the gendarmes, strode arrogantly from the room.

I went to the commissioner with my report.

Incredible as it may seem, Vidocq had estimated the situation correctly. Although the French police, as well as I, were absolutely convinced of his guilt, so great was his hypnotic influence over people, such was the cleverness with which he denied the charges, that no jury was willing to convict him. And he went scot free. He lived to the age of eighty-two,

dabbling in skulduggery until the day of his death. His adventures became the subject of many novels and plays by the foremost writers of the ages.

I've come a great distance in my profession. And I deal with the darnedest criminals. Yet I must confess that I haven't met up with another like him.

THE FABULOUS DON JAMES

"WHAT is the meaning of these ominous words?"

It was a sultry morning in the midsummer of 1883. The people of Phoenix were staring at the placards that had been posted throughout the city overnight. An anxious group had gathered in front of one of these posters. A tall, thin man was reading it aloud for the benefit of those who were too far back to see it:

"Aviso. Hearken ye, all men. That person or persons now situate on La Baronía de Arisonac, known also as the Peralta Grant, will be subject to removal unless proper arrangements are made and set forth as a matter of record. By order of the Baron, Don James Addison de Peralta-Reavis."

A rumble of angry mutterings and questions and threats.

"Who is this Don James?"

"And what does he want?"

"What is the Peralta Grant?"

"And La Baronía de Arisonac?"

"Who's going to be removed?"

"And from where? And why?"

"Let 'em try to remove *me*. I'll show them!"

"What is it all about, anyhow?"

Before the day was over, they learned what it was all about. The Phoenix *Gazette* had the entire story—and it was one of the most amazing stories ever printed in an American newspaper. Don James Addison, the man who had issued the posters, was a mysterious personage known as the Baron de Arisonac and the Caballero de los Colorados. He claimed title not only to the entire city of Phoenix but to almost twenty thousand square miles of territory in Arizona and in New Mexico—an area greater than that of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut combined.

If the baron's claim was valid, everybody who lived in that area found himself dispossessed. The land, with all its improvements—buildings, farms, factories, banks, railways, and mines—had become a kingdom within the borders of the United States. Phoenix was but one of the cities in that kingdom. Every inhabitant of that city, and of the entire designated territory, was now a vassal to Don James—the King of the Golden West. They must pay him their allotted tribute, in the form of rent, or find themselves on the street.

There was a mass meeting of the aroused citizens of Phoenix. They formed a committee to investigate Don James, to study the validity of his claim, and to find out what they could do to protect their own rights.

After due investigation, they learned that apparently they could do nothing at all. The Baron de Arisonac's claim seemed to be absolutely valid, his right to the territory beyond dispute.

The history of the baron's claim, as it unfolded from day to day, was like a story out of the *Arabian Nights*. And Don James, as he told his story to the committee, was like a prince out of an exotic fairy tale. His figure was well proportioned to his more than medium height. His Dundreary whiskers, connected into a semicircle by a heavy mustache, framed a sensitive mouth that seemed always ready to break into a smile. And the sunlight of his smile was reflected in his dark brown eyes and in the dimple of his shaved chin. A thin patrician nose gave the final touch to a face of extraordinary elegance. In that face there was not the slightest hint of cruelty or cunning or deceit.

His manner was courteous and his speech refined. His words were like music as he delivered them with a slight Spanish accent. They lulled the listener into an acquiescent mood. "Gentlemen," he said, "it grieves me to disturb the even tenor of your ways. But I have a just claim to pursue, and I feel that justice must be served."

And then he went on—patiently and courteously and with a show of genuine reluctance—to a detailed account of his claim:

"Long before this country became the United States, gentlemen, our Spanish kings were accustomed to rewarding their deserving *caballeros* with huge grants of land across the sea.

One of these grants is the territory now under consideration before us."

He took a map from his pocket and spread it out before the members of the committee. "If you will observe, gentlemen, this territory includes all the land in the counties of Apache, Gila, Graham, Maricopa, and Pinal. And these counties, as you will further note, contain the townships of Casa Grande, Florence, Globe, Pinal, Silver King, and Tempe, as well as the entire city of Phoenix."

He stopped for a few moments, allowing the committee to examine the map, and then he went on: "This territory also includes the Silver King Mine and the right of way to the Southern Pacific Railroad."

He sat back, looked at the astonished members of the committee, and concluded in a voice that seemed to be tinged with genuine sorrow: "I regret to inform you, gentlemen, that all these cities and towns and counties, as well as all the improvements therein, are now my property."

For a while the members of the committee sat as if stunned. It was a fantastic claim to a fabulous amount of wealth—much of it belonging, as they had believed, to themselves. Yet this man spoke so convincingly, and he seemed to be so sure of himself. Was he a lunatic, a scoundrel, or an honest man with a just demand?

At last one of the members of the committee found his voice. It was Bill Stuart, a reporter on the Phoenix *Gazette*. "Who made the original grant, sir? And to whom? And how did you come to get it at this time?"

Don James looked at Stuart with an indulgent smile. "Your questions are quite in order, young man, and I shall answer them in due time."

And in due time he did answer every question, and covered every loophole, and established his claim to the satisfaction of some of the leading lawyers in the United States.

The grant, he pointed out, was a gift of King Ferdinand bestowed, on December 20, 1748, upon his warrior kinsman, Miguel de Peralta. "I will show you copies of all the records, gentlemen—and I will direct you to the archives where you may find the originals—from which you can ascertain the truth of everything I tell you."

And then he went on to trace the story of "my ancestors,

the Peralta nobility," from the time of Miguel down to his own day. "Don Miguel, as the records will show you, was related not only to King Ferdinand of Spain but to King Henry of Navarre. He was a great personage in the royal court. The gracious King Ferdinand did him the honor to appoint him Gentleman of the Bed Chamber, Grandee of Spain, Knight of the Royal Military Order, and Knight of the Insignia of the College of Our Lady of Guadalupe."

This was no lunatic speaking to them. His story was too logical, and it held together at every point. And his manner did not seem to be the manner of a thief. His eyes spoke conviction, and his voice rang true. The terrified people of Arizona saw their property slipping away from them as he went on building his case with unassailable documentary evidence covering a period of over a hundred years.

It took several months for the evidence to be completed. And when it was all in, there seemed to be no doubt as to the genuineness of the Peralta claim. Don Juan had established the succession of this claim, from generation to generation, until its final transfer into his own hands. He paraded before the members of the committee a genealogy of scores of descendants of Don Miguel. He recited the most detailed accounts of their lives. He referred to obscure historic places and events which, upon careful investigation, turned out to be authentic. And he produced a letter from Santa Anna, the President of Mexico, which emphatically corroborated his claim. "I have personally examined the Mexican records mentioned in the Baron de Arisonac's claim, and I have found them in every case to be exact."

Don James had practically established his right to a golden empire in the West.

But there were some people—especially that cynical reporter, Bill Stuart—who kept asking further questions. "Assuming that your claim is authentic, sir, how are we to know that you are the only living heir to this claim?"

Don James focused his exquisite smile upon the reporter "A very good question, Mr. Stuart, and I shall try to give you a satisfactory answer. I made a careful investigation of the matter—it took me several years—and I found that I was not the only living heir to this claim, but that there were two other possible claimants."

He paid no attention to the murmur of surprise in the committee room, but went on with his story. "One of these two other claimants was a poor Mexican by the name of José Peralta—a distant kinsman of mine and a legitimate heir to part of the Peralta Grant."

"Well, what about him?" asked Stuart.

"Poor fellow, he didn't understand his rights. He sold them, for a thousand dollars, to a certain Dr. Harold Williams. And Dr. Williams, in turn, sold those rights to me for thirty thousand dollars."

"Do you know where these two men are at present?" asked Bill Stuart.

"These two men, I regret to inform you, are now dead. But," he added as he saw the lifting of Stuart's eyebrows, "I have in my possession all the papers dealing with these two transactions."

"And these papers," observed Stuart sarcastically, "are authentic, I suppose, like all your other documents."

"Quite authentic, sir, as you will see for yourself when you examine them."

Stuart nodded abruptly. "Very well, sir. And now, what about the other claimant you mentioned?"

Don James's face lighted up with a seraphic smile. "Ah, that other claimant! A very interesting person, gentlemen."

And then he went on to tell about a woman whose story was as fantastic as his own story. "In the course of my investigation, gentlemen, I discovered that on September 14, 1859, there were twin sisters born at San Bernardino, California. One of the twins died. The other grew up to maturity. Her name is Sofia Loreta Micaela. Like myself, she is a direct descendant of Don Miguel, the original possessor of the Peralta Grant."

And, patiently and minutely, he began to trace the ancestry of the lady in question. Again, as before, he brought to life the history of scores of people—in Spain, in Portugal, in Mexico—whose successive inheritance had handed down the right to the Peralta fortune from Don Miguel to Doña Sofia.

"And how," asked Stuart, with the acid of suspicion in his voice, "did you dispose of Doña Sofia?"

"Doña Sofia," smiled the unruffled Don James, "is my wife."

The case was now complete, and it seemed watertight. Don James appeared to be the sole owner of the Peralta Grant. All other titles to parcels of land within that territory were, even in the opinion of many who held these titles, null and void.

Yet there were a few who persisted in fighting the claim. They hired lawyers, scholars, handwriting experts, and private detectives to trace down the claim, document by document, step by patient step. Archives were ransacked, parchments were taken down from dusty shelves, old prints were subjected to chemical analysis and microscopic scrutiny—and nowhere could the investigators find a single flaw. After the most exacting research, both in the old country and in the new, there was a single decisive report:

"Don James Addison has established his right to the Peralta claim."

And there was no other conclusion to be drawn, since all the documentary evidence seemed to point to the following facts:

King Ferdinand of Spain had made the grant.

The Spanish Inquisition had confirmed it.

The Viceroy of Mexico had acknowledged it.

The heirs of Don Miguel had a right to it.

Don Addison and his wife, Doña Sofia, were now the sole surviving heirs to this right.

And now a number of men took up the cudgels for Don James. Among them were the famous lecturer, Robert G. Ingersoll, and the United States senator, Roscoe Conkling. Encouraged by the support of these celebrities, Don James secured the assistance of Charles Crocker and Collis P. Huntington to finance his claim.

Don James was triumphant. His opponents dropped out of the battle, one by one. Even the more skeptical among them had become convinced of his honesty. It seemed that no human imagination could have created out of thin air so splendid an array of living characters. His story was too perfect to be fictitious—*therefore it must be true.*

So they paid him their tribute and bowed themselves out. The Southern Pacific Railroad bought a quitclaim from him for fifty thousand dollars. The Silver King Mine paid him an installment of twenty-five thousand dollars—with a promise of further payments until he would set them free. All the other

big and small landowners on his "domain" submitted to his demands and bought him off. Thousands of the smaller fry scraped together their savings and their borrowings and poured them into his coffers to buy their freedom. Within a short time Don James had become the richest as well as the most powerful magnate of the Western states.

And he began to live like a king. He collected millions in tribute, and more millions from industrialists who hoped to profit by his daring ventures. He invested his money in gold and silver and copper mines, in coal and lumber and oil, in railroads and real estate. And he squandered his income with an extravagant hand. He spent as much as one hundred thousand dollars a year on travel alone. He bought palatial homes in St. Louis and Washington and Mexico City and Madrid. His carriages were drawn by six white horses with harnesses of silver and gold. And, as he rode through the streets, thousands of people cheered him on—with a staccato accompaniment, however, of curses and threats.

He went to live for a time in New York. He hired a "royal suite" at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where his wife was delivered of twin boys. He entertained the richest families in the richest city of the world—and he outdid them all in the lavishness of his display. Everybody paid court to the King and the Queen of the Golden West, and to the two little princes as they toddled over the floor in their Spanish regalia of red velvet embroidered in gold.

When the princes were about five years old he took them to Madrid. It was a magnificent visit from the "royal family" of Arizona to the royal family of Spain. The children played with Alfonso, the heir to the Spanish throne. And when the family returned to America, Don James was more resplendent than ever in the eyes of his toadies and his slaves. For in his sojourn at the Spanish court he had literally acquired the royal touch.

Yet there were a few Americans who still clung to their belief that he was a fraud. Most tenacious among them all was Bill Stuart. He had no proof to substantiate his belief. But he kept hoping that somehow, somewhere, he would discover a way to discredit the story of Don James.

One day the don invited Stuart to his home. When Stuart arrived there he was ushered into the "office"—a blaring study in crimson and purple and gold. He looked around him with

an air of mock reverence. "Am I supposed to make obeisance in the presence of the Lord?" he asked.

"Come, come, Mr. Stuart," returned Don James in his most affable tone. "I am a simple man, like yourself, and I have asked you here to become better acquainted. I want the two of us to be friends."

"Sort of lion and lamb sporting side by side, Don James? Or is the lamb about to be swallowed inside of the lion?"

"You do me a great injustice, Mr. Stuart. I repeat that I want to be your friend. Here, have a cigar."

"No, thanks. I prefer the smell of my own pipe. I bought this pipe from an honest man."

Don James shrugged his shoulders as he lighted his own cigar. "As you will, Mr. Stuart."

He puffed for a few moments in silence. Stuart was getting impatient. "Well, Don James, what's the bribe?"

Don James puckered his lips in an elegant display of amazement. "Bribe, Mr. Stuart? Am I the sort of man to give it? And are you the sort of man to take it?"

"To your last question, sir, the answer is a decided *no*."

"Very well, then, we understand each other. I have asked you to come here, Mr. Stuart, because I admire your ability and your integrity."

"The fish, sir, is too far away to see the bait. Come closer, so I can tell what you're after."

"I don't like your metaphor, Mr. Stuart. However, I'll make myself clear. I am about to start a newspaper at Phoenix, and I want you to be the editor of that paper."

"Why pick on *me?* I'm sure there are others far better qualified than I am."

"Not to my way of thinking, Mr. Stuart. I'll speak bluntly. You have been my enemy. You have tried to undermine the justice of my claim. So far, so bad. I have every reason to dislike you. But I also have a good reason to like you. You are honest, you are determined, you are brave. I am not afraid of you, because you are not in a position to injure me. You cannot invalidate my claim, because it is a true claim. You cannot disprove the truth.

"And so I make this offer to you in good faith, and in the best interests of the public. Become the editor of my paper. And keep on investigating my claim. I have no objection to

that, since the investigation will only convince you of what I am trying to tell you."

These words took Stuart somewhat aback. He had expected a bribe as the price of his silence, or a threat in the event of his refusal to let the matter drop. But here was a magnanimous gesture he had never expected. Perhaps Don James was a sincere and honest man after all? "Do you really mean, sir," he said hesitantly, "that you would allow me to work for and against you at the same time?"

"Why not?" smiled Don James. "Actually you would be working not *against* me but *for* me. I am really anxious to have my claim established beyond the shadow of suspicion or dispute."

"But suppose"—Stuart still hesitated—"I were to find some evidence that would invalidate your claim? What about the loyalty due to an employer? How would I feel if I had to disclose this evidence? On the other hand, how could I conscientiously keep the evidence away from the public?"

"Your first duty as editor would always be to the public. But rest assured, Mr. Stuart, you will never have occasion to divide your allegiance."

Stuart shrugged his shoulders. "You sound very plausible, I must say."

"I am plausible because I am sincere."

Stuart looked steadily into the eyes of Don James. They gazed as steadily back into his own. He asked one more question: "And suppose I refuse your offer?"

"In that case," Don James smiled, "you are free to do as you please. You are under no obligation to me whatsoever."

"Thank you, Don James. I will consider the matter and give you my decision in a few days."

"As you will, Mr. Stuart. And now will you accept one of my cigars? As a sort of peace offering, you know."

"Why not?" Stuart took the cigar, shook the proffered hand —the clasp was warm and friendly and firm—and left with his mind in a turmoil. He couldn't make out this man. Though he still distrusted him, he couldn't help admiring him. He didn't feel like accepting the offer. Somewhere along the line, he suspected, there was some trick. Yet he couldn't be sure of his suspicion. It seemed almost impossible to disbelieve

Don James. His eyes, his face, his voice, his general bearing—everything about him bespoke the honest man.

Besides, he needed the job. He was only a tramp reporter, drifting about from place to place. It was time for him to settle down. Better men than himself—lawyers, bankers, industrialists—had accepted employment under this man. Why shouldn't he do the same? It would be regarded as perfectly respectable in the eyes of the world.

But what about his own conscience? If he took this job, could he face himself as an impartial investigator of the truth? He tried to tell himself that he could; yet, in the depths of his heart, he had his doubts.

After several days of conflicting emotions, he sent a note to Don James:

"I am sorry, sir, and I am probably acting like a fool. But I have decided to refuse your generous offer."

The reply was as courteous as it was prompt:

"I accept and I admire your decision. Let us remain friends, yes?"

A few nights later, as Stuart was returning home from a tavern, he was shot in the left shoulder. It was only the dim light in the street lamp that kept the bullet from entering his heart.

Was this shot, coming so close upon his interview with Don James, a mere coincidence? Stuart had many enemies in Phoenix. His fearless pen had often pointed in the direction of corrupt politics, shady transactions, and misapplied funds. And so he couldn't be sure as to the exact persons or reasons for the attempt upon his life.

But somehow he couldn't get rid of the idea that Don James was at the bottom of it all. At any rate, the very danger of this idea gave added zest to his research into the documents of the Peralta Grant.

This research seemed destined to end in failure. An entire decade had rolled by since the courts had decided in favor of Don James. He now seemed firmly established on his throne. No further attempts had been made upon Stuart's life. This

was due, perhaps, to the fact that Stuart was too elusive a target nowadays. He was traveling from place to place—doing odd newspaper chores when he could get them or just begging his way along—and always impelled by a single consuming passion. He had become, to use his own whimsical phrase, "a wandering investigator of the truth." It was no longer a matter of academic curiosity, or of journalistic pride. It had become a crusade.

And, apparently, a hopeless crusade. At times even Stuart grew tired of the quest. He had examined thousands of parchments and papers. He had made microscopic studies of prints, chemical analyses of inks, comparisons of handwritings, and investigations of royal and ecclesiastical seals. And everywhere the chain of evidence held together, with not a single missing or imperfect link.

"I guess I was wrong after all," he concluded. "All these years I've been on the trail of an innocent man."

He was about to quit. And then, when he least expected it, he found a clue. He was looking at one of the Peralta records in Mexico City. It was a document consisting of several sheets of old parchment. It was dated September 3, 1759. As he scrutinized one of the sheets he accidentally held it up to the light. And then his eyes almost popped out of his head. *The sheet bore the watermark of a paper mill in Wisconsin.* He knew about that mill. It had been organized only recently—almost a century after the date of the record he was examining.

Hastily he held up the other sheets to the light. *They had no watermark.*

There was no longer any doubt in Bill Stuart's mind. The sheet with the watermark was a forgery. It had been substituted for another sheet that had been taken out of the document. And here was a significant point that clinched the matter: All the data referring to the Peralta Grant were to be found on the new sheet. The other sheets bore not a single reference to this grant.

With this clew as a starting point, it was an easy matter to trace down the entire story of the Peralta claim. From beginning to end, it turned out to be a gigantic fraud—one of the most amazing frauds in the history of the world. The government appointed a number of agents to make a fresh investigation of the claim. These agents discovered that the king's

"favorite"—Miguel de Peralta—had never existed, and that the life stories of the hundreds of Miguel's "descendants" were the concoctions of a crooked imagination with a genius for creative fiction.

The story of the Peralta Grant, in short, was one of the most brilliant novels ever written.

And parallel to this novel was another of almost equal brilliance—the faked story of Sofia's noble descent. This woman turned out to be Carmelita, a waif whom James Addison Reavis —the phony "Baron de Arisonac"—had picked up at a ranch where she worked as a slavey. She had known nothing of her origin, and she had had no education. But Reavis had become her Pygmalion. He had given her a name, a family, a culture, and an ambition to become the queen of his royal domain.

As for Don James himself, the story of his life was even more amazing than the stories of his creation. It all came out at the trial. James Addison Reavis had no Spanish trace whatsoever in his blood. He was an American born in Missouri, who, as a Confederate soldier in the Civil War, had accidentally discovered that he could forge his captain's handwriting. He made out a pass for himself, signed it with his captain's name, and got a leave of absence for several days.

This criminal cleverness, as he soon found out, could become profitable as well as pleasant. He began to forge passes not only for himself but for the other soldiers as well. And he made a pretty penny out of this "delightful relaxation" from his military duties.

Discharged from the army before the end of the war, he got a job as a streetcar conductor in St. Louis. He spent all his spare time, however, in developing his talent as a forger. He was as methodical in his "finger exercises" as any musical virtuoso, and he became more and more expert as time went on.

When he felt that he had attained sufficient skill as an amateur, he decided to try his hand as a professional. He opened a real-estate office, and here he had plenty of opportunity to test his skill. He forged titles to parcels of property—and got away with it every time. He had an honest face, a hearty handshake, and an ingratiating smile. Nobody would ever think of suspecting "Genial Jim" of duplicity.

And so Jim went blithely ahead with his self-appointed study toward his self-seeking degree of M.D.—Master of Deceit.

He graduated from St. Louis to the border city of Santa Fe—a place of "higher yearning" for the crooks and the scoundrels of the day. At this city there was a rich pasture for the black sheep of the human family. The ownership of much of the land in New Mexico was under dispute as a result of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty, which ended the Mexican War, contained an article providing for the settlement of the ancient land grants made by the Spanish kings to various individuals before the emergence of Mexico as an independent state.

As a result of the treaty there were many claims—fraudulent as well as true—to these ancient land grants. The American government had set up, at Santa Fe, a bureau of investigation to sift out the true claims from the false.

James Addison Reavis got himself a job at this bureau—a fertile field for his cratfy imagination. Here he had a chance to examine all sorts of claims, to become thoroughly familiar with the geography of the Western states and to learn the history of many noble Spanish families both in the Old World and in the New.

Also he learned another thing which was even more important to his plans. He studied the various tricks which the fraudulent claimants had tried to employ, the weakness and the strength of these tricks, and the more or less successful methods used to prevent the detection of a fraud. Armed with this knowledge, he learned little by little how to build up his own colossal fraud.

But he was not yet ready to begin. First he must become thoroughly familiar with the Spanish language—both ancient and modern. And so he settled down to a painstaking course in philology. He accustomed himself to talk and to think and to feel like a Spaniard. His brilliance as a linguist proved equal to his craftiness as a forger. Within a few years he was able to pass for a Spanish nobleman.

His next job was to create a fictitious family tree that would support his fraudulent claim to nobility. It took him several additional years to do this—fabricating character after character, story after story, tradition after tradition, and weaving them all together into a plot that culminated in himself and his ambitious scheme.

This invention of a series of historical fantasies was a task worthy of a Walter Scott. But a still greater task lay ahead. He

must now interweave his plot and his characters not only into a semblance of reality but into reality itself. In other words, he must turn his fiction into a fact—a claim which, upon the closest scrutiny, would pass as legal and valid and true.

So he entered upon a succession of travels—to Mexico, South America, Portugal, Spain—visiting monasteries, digging into royal archives, and burrowing like a mole into the secrets of the forgotten past. And, step by step, he kept tampering with the old records—erasing and substituting words, names, paragraphs, pages, sometimes forging an entire document in ancient phraseology—until he had built up the complicated structure of his fraudulent claim.

Not the least amazing part of his adventure was his ability to gain access to some of the most secret archives in the world. His ticket of admission to these places was his affable personality illumined by his disarming smile.

And it was this genial smile that enabled him to hoodwink many little fishes with minor frauds of various kinds. Thus he was able to support himself throughout his long preparation for the master crime of his life.

It was to be the perfect crime. And it might have been, but for his one fatal error—the insertion of a modern American sheet of paper in an ancient Spanish file.

The rest of the story can be told in a few words. James Reavis was found guilty of fraud. There was an effort made to convict him of more serious crimes—such as the shooting of Bill Stuart and the murder of Dr. Harold Williams. This doctor, it was learned, had died mysteriously on the very night on which he had "sold" the fraudulent Peralta claim to James Reavis. But the state found no evidence to connect Reavis with any of these crimes.

And so Reavis got away with a sentence of six years in the Santa Fe penitentiary. His wife, who had been arrested along with him, was set free. Apparently she was but another dupe of his gigantic fraud. Even after his conviction she kept believing in her husband's honesty and in her own noble descent.

But finally she was brought to her senses. A careful investigation of her birth certificate established the fact that she was a waif of unknown parentage. When the halo of nobility had faded from her mind, she divorced her husband and wisely

returned to the obscurity from which she had been dragged into the light.

And the idol who had dazzled her, and educated her, and laid a kingdom at her feet, shuffled out of the penitentiary a poor and lonely and broken man. He spent the rest of his days among the old newspaper files in the library. And his still handsome face would light up with a smile as he read, over and over again, the stupendous fantasy of his own creation. "How could such a big story come out of a little head like mine?"

And then, intoxicated by his vanity even at this late date, he would murmur: "But why not? Shakespeare, the butcher, wrote the world's greatest plays. Why shouldn't Reavis, the streetcar conductor, have written the world's greatest novel?"

THE SECOND ROBINSON CRUSOE

ONE morning in 1898 a wiry, slightly built old man with a face tanned by the sun and a crown of scrubby iron-gray hair walked into the editorial offices of the *Wide World* magazine in London. Awkwardly he took a seat, hunched himself forward, and darted quaint, shy looks around him.

"Who are you?" asked the editor.

"I am Louis de Rougemont," replied the stranger in a thick French accent. There was a moment of silence. Then into his eyes came a look of childlike enthusiasm. "I have a story to tell."

"Just a moment," replied the editor. "Everybody has a story to tell." He stopped short suddenly. Perhaps a form of hypnosis was at work on him, or perhaps it was that the face opposite suggested a suffering beyond the ordinary. "Well, go ahead. But I warn you, be brief!"

The stranger spoke haltingly. Constantly he struggled to find the right word, only to surrender to a gesture of his body. But for all the stumbling of his tongue, he wove a spell. The time he took to tell his tale seemed only seconds to the hard-boiled editor. When he was done, the editor asked himself: "Have I been presented with the journalistic scoop of the century?" Aloud he said, "You are correct. This is an extraordinary story. Of course, before we publish it, we must verify it as the absolute truth."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "Naturally, if you know people who are in a position to check my statements, I will be glad to submit to their examination."

And so the following day the editor introduced his protégé to members of the leading scientific institutions in London. "This, gentlemen, is Monsieur de Rougemont, who says he has undergone an experience unique in the history of white men.

He has spent thirty years among the Australian cannibals as their chief!"

Anthropologists, geographers, sociologists shook their heads skeptically. Then they bombarded him with questions about the climate, the topography of the Australian bush country and the habits of the tribes. Monsieur de Rougemont replied unhesitantly, accurately confirming to the minutest detail all that was known to the savants. One explorer, in particular, posed a question that he was certain would expose the man as a fraud. "You say you have lived among the people in the Kimberley region of Australia," he said. "Tell me, how do they decorate themselves?"

And Louis de Rougemont replied, "They gash themselves and rub ashes into the cuts, leaving raised scars. The men have four ridges cut into the back; the women have three on the waist."

The explorer extended his hand. "I apologize," he said. "I didn't think that there was another white man besides me who could answer this. You have been there!"

In July 1898, amid a fanfare of publicity, the *Wide World* magazine published the first installment of Louis de Rougemont's thirty years among the cannibals. . . . He was born, declared the author, in 1844, near Paris, the son of a prosperous merchant. As a young man he took a trip to Singapore, where he met Peter Jensen, a Dutch pearl fisher. "I am organizing an expedition to the pearling grounds off New Guinea," Jensen announced. "Would you like to come along?"

The lure of pearls was irresistible. De Rougemont joined him. Jensen put a vessel in trim, engaged a crew of Malayan divers, appointed a "serang" or "boss" over them, and set sail for the New Guinea pearling grounds. Here they had fine luck. Day after day the Malayans dove into the translucent waters. For wages they received rum, tobacco, and bottles of chutney pickles which were considered a delicacy.

The work was risky. Octopuses sometimes attacked a diver on the ocean bed and crushed the life out of him. Once a giant octopus rose to the surface and pursued a terror-stricken Malayan, who swam to his boat and climbed into it. The octopus stretched its giant tentacles around the boat and sucked it, man and all, into the depths. A team of the man's comrades, diving with a net of stout twine, maneuvered underneath the

octopus and its victim and hauled them to the surface. They slashed at the octopus with their knives, grabbed the legs of the diver, and with a tremendous effort dragged him out of its grasp. It was none too soon. The man was almost dead. He had been held by the octopus under the water for more than two minutes.

The pearls gathered in these grounds were beautiful to behold. Some were as large as pigeon's eggs, rose-colored, yellow, and white. But one morning brought the most priceless harvest of all—three magnificent black pearls within a single oyster shell. Greed appeared in Captain Jensen's eyes. "Mates, we have struck a fortune. These are unbelievably rare, worth more than all the others together. By Jove, we shall stay here and find some more."

"But, Captain," the crew reminded him, "the season is almost at an end. The cyclones are at hand."

Jensen was adamant. He was completely in the grip of "pearl fever."

"There are more black beauties where these came from. And a hurricane won't stop me from finding them!"

June passed into July. He drove the crew mercilessly, looking for black pearls. But none were discovered after the first prize.

In the middle of July, Jensen set out as usual with his crew of divers for the pearl banks, leaving De Rougemont in charge of the ship. The weather was threatening. The aneroid jumped ominously. De Rougemont made hasty preparations against the oncoming storm. He battened down the hatches, secured every movable thing. Shortly the wind blew with such force that he could not stand upright. He had to crawl about on his hands and knees.

By noon the full force of the cyclone struck. The rain almost blinded him. Below in the hold a dog howled mournfully. A mountain of water burst over the decks, tearing away the bulwarks, the galley, the steering wheel. All compasses and charts were lost. Suddenly the ship struck ground with an impact that almost tore her asunder. She had careened into one of the coral reefs that studded these shallow waters. As she commenced to settle on her side, De Rougemont freed the dog below and leaped together with the animal into the water for a sandbank that lay a few hundred yards ahead.

He struggled against the tide; and when he reached the sand, he battled the backwash. Eventually he succeeded in crawling ashore with the dog.

What he saw gave him a shock. He had been cast upon a sand pit barely a hundred yards long, ten yards wide, eight feet above the sea. Exploring with his toes, he found that the sand was no more than four or five inches deep above solid rock. Here indeed was a spot on which a man could go insane! But the pressure of immediate survival temporarily erased all thoughts of the future.

Fortunately the ship he had abandoned on the reef was within an easy swim in clear weather. When the storm had abated, he made numerous trips to it and transferred food and weapons to the sandbank. He removed a cargo of New Guinea wood, which provided excellent fuel for a fire, once the spark and been ignited by the striking of a steel tomahawk against a stone.

He salvaged tons of oyster shells from the ship and built out of them a hut ten feet long, seven feet high, three feet thick, under a straw-thatched roof. For food, he lived on fish and the birds he brought down with his arrows.

He had no idea where he was or whether he would ever be found. From time to time he was plunged into such melancholy that he rushed into the sea, intending to drown himself. But when he reached up to his neck in water, he was seized with sudden revulsion. He turned back to shore—and lived on.

To keep from going mad, he spoke to his dog for hours at a stretch. He told him all the details of his early life, his meeting with Peter Jensen, the adventures leading up to the shipwreck. He sang him little French songs at which the animal set up a howl!

In the hope of escaping from the accursed sandbank, he built a boat fifteen feet long out of the lumber and staves of the ship. Nine months he spent in constructing it. When he was done, he made a discovery that almost drove him out of his mind. The lagoon in which he launched the boat was several miles long, bounded by a barrier of coral rocks. He could not, singlehandedly, lug the craft over these rocks to float it in the open sea. And he found that although the reefs were covered with water at high tide, it was never deep enough to permit sailing over it. This was the last straw. For days he raved like

a lunatic. And then his fury subsided and he succumbed to a mood of calm, terrible despair.

For two years he lived on the sandbank. And then one morning the frenzied barking of his dog brought him down to the edge of the water. A hundred yards at sea a raft tossed crazily. He could discern the figures of human beings lying upon it. He prayed that these human beings who had been cast into his world would not turn out to be creatures of a mirage. Plunging into the water, he swam out toward the raft that was being rapidly propelled by the waves toward shore. He gave it final guidance, beached it, dragged the victims one by one into his hut. They were native blacks—a man, a woman, a little girl, and a boy. They were more dead than alive. He rubbed their bodies vigorously with the rum he had salvaged from his ship, tied wet bandages around their faces.

When they opened their eyes they observed him with awe. He made signs of friendliness, allowed them to pat his skin, and gradually won their confidence. The woman was especially friendly. Gradually he learned to interpret her guttural sounds, and soon he was able to exchange elementary ideas with her. He guessed that they were Australian bush people who had been shipwrecked on a fishing expedition. And a great hope possessed him. These folk could not have come from any great distance. He judged that the Australian mainland could not be more than a few hundred miles away. Furthermore, he now had two able-bodied people to help him haul his boat over the reefs.

He loaded the boat with turtle meat and bags of water. And early one morning he embarked with his strange little crew. Day and night they sailed steadily before the wind. On the tenth day Yamba, the woman, clutched his arm excitedly and issued cries which plainly signified, "We are nearing our home!" And, indeed, land loomed ahead—Australia!

As they drew nearer, a large bay was outlined to their view. But the white man did not head for it. Instead he steered for an adjacent island. Here he landed. Yamba and her husband lit smoke signals. Immediately three catamarans, carrying native chiefs painted in white, red, and yellow ocher, put out to meet them.

Yamba told her people how she and her husband had drifted to the island residence of a powerful white spirit who had consented to accompany them home.

Upon hearing this, the chiefs signaled to their tribesmen on shore, and these, in turn, transmitted the news to all the surrounding clans. A vast gathering of natives gathered on the beach to welcome the white god. Their jabbering was deafening. They swarmed all over his boat; they examined his footprints in the sand with amazement. Finally they made known to him that he was to be guest of honor at a feast.

De Rougemont sat down with the tribe, unprepared for the scene that awaited him. Curiously he watched a team of women dig a series of trenches. Then he almost jumped out of his skin; for a group of warriors carrying human bodies placed them in the trenches, covered them with stones and sand, and built a roaring fire. In a daze, he watched these natives uncover the trench ovens at a signal; smelled the roasting of the bodies; heard the liquid spurting from the skin.

With a spine-chilling shriek, the cannibals helped themselves to hunks of carcass, danced and feasted, and then dropped down to sleep by the fire with their bellies full. With horror, De Rougemont realized that he had been saved from the oven only because these man-eaters stood in awe of him.

There was absolutely no escape from these savages. Although they looked upon him as a deity, he was a virtual prisoner of theirs. He was doomed to settle down amid these fierce Australian bushmen. And he prepared to make the best of it.

Not long after the terrible experience of the cannibal feast, he was offered a young woman in marriage. He went to the husband of Yamba and offered to exchange wives. The proposal was accepted. And he settled down with the woman who had been cast up on his sandbank and of whom he had grown extremely fond.

He lived in security only by continually astonishing the natives with his "miracles." He performed acrobatics, sleight-of-hand tricks, and amazed them with his use of the bow and arrow. The tribesmen presented him with a stick on which were engraved cabalistic figures. He tied this into his long luxurious hair, which was arranged bun-fashion in a net of opossum. With this stick as passport, he passed from one strange tribe to another as safely as though he were a visiting chief.

He took frequent trips, making notes of the surrounding country. During these excursions he came across huge quantities of gold—gold enough to make a nation rich—lying at his

feet. He smiled bitterly. Of what use was it to him in the bush country? He would gladly surrender it all for a few ounces of salt.

He saw many phenomena in his wanderings. On one occasion Yamba, who accompanied him, suddenly signaled for him to climb a tree. She followed him up. A vast army of rats, migrating from the lowlands to the mountains, appeared on the horizon. Soon the landscape as far as the eye could see was covered with rodents packed so closely together that not an inch of ground was exposed. All living things were mowed down by them—snakes, lizards, even huge kangaroos. Those rats who hesitated in their march were eaten by their fellows. The air shook with the shrill squealing, the patter of thousands of little feet. The memory chilled De Rougemont as long as he lived.

As the months lengthened into years, the hope that a sail would appear on the gulf, or that a caravan of explorers would reach him, had all but died. From time to time he had heard the natives talk of white men coming to trade many miles to the north; and once, in a fit of desperation, he had set out to travel through the heart of the continent in the hope of reaching his fellow Europeans. But as soon as he reached the sandy desert of the spinifex country, he was consumed with a fever that almost killed him. He roamed about wildly in a circle and found himself, after eighteeen months, home again among his tribe fellows.

Gradually he had become a perfect child of the bush country. His skin had been tanned by the Australian sun to an almost native hue. He roamed about as naked as any of the savages. Their instincts and cunning were his.

One day a delegation of tribesmen made him an offer: "Will you be our chief?"

He accepted and assumed a dress appropriate for the office. He mounted his hair on strips of whalebone to a height of two feet and decorated it with black and white cockatoo feathers. He painted his face in four colors, signifying the highest rank—black, yellow, red, and white. He assumed absolute command over five hundred people.

In a forest of white gum and eucalyptus, where the grass and fern grew to a tremendous height, he constructed—or rather had built by Yamba and the other women, for manual

labor was considered to be undignified for a chief—a dwelling, the largest ever seen by the natives. It was a one-story house consisting of two rooms, a sitting room and a bedchamber, whose rough log walls were decorated with ferns, the skins of animals, weapons of warfare, and giant swordfish. The floor was built high enough above the ground to escape the reach of rats, and it was covered with fresh eucalyptus leaves whose odor repelled the mosquitoes. He built a second dwelling two days' journey up the mountains, to which he retired during the extreme heat. For his household he collected a menagerie of pets, including a tame cockatoo.

He had two children by Yamba, a boy and a girl. Only the whiteness of their hands betrayed the fact that they were half-castes, not total blacks. Yamba had urged him to take at least half a dozen other wives, for a great tribal chief was expected to have a number of consorts and Yamba took pride in his rank. But he refused to yield to her wishes. He had enough trouble asserting authority over his superstitious subjects without managing a tribe of women in his own home.

However, he did maintain what amounted to an orphan asylum for young females. Before his arrival the natives had the habit of killing unwanted girl children. He put a stop to this, ordering all parents to transmit their "surplus" girl babies to him. Before long single young males for miles around approached him for wives. He became a father-in-law on a tremendous scale.

He led his people in peace and in war. He taught them cricket and football. One sport especially favored by them was turtle-riding in the gulf. Tournaments were held at which the blacks captured six-hundred-pound turtles and rode astride them through the waves. The natives used a curious method to steer them. For a left turn they thrust a foot into the turtle's right eye, and vice versa. To bring the turtle to a halt, they placed both toes simultaneously over its eyes.

De Rougemont put a stop to the continual warfare his tribe engaged in with its neighbors. In his very first battle as a commander in chief, he mounted on stilts several feet high. As he marched in the middle of his army, he looked like a terrible god in war paint. The enemy turned and fled, and thereafter his people enjoyed peace.

Not always were his miracles effective, however. He collected

charcoal, sulphur, and saltpeter, but he was unable to make a mixture of gunpowder whose explosion would startle the blacks. He collected cold water from a cave, poured it into opossum skins, and wrapped it in saltpeter. But he failed to manufacture ice. However, he discovered a deposit of crude petroleum; and he was able to astound his people with the weird "witch flames" he produced.

Always he had to be on guard. He once described himself to the natives as a special ambassador-spirit sent by a mighty ruler of a world empire. He used the British Empire, with its vast colonies, as his model for description. But he let slip the remark that its ruler was a woman. Instantly he recognized, by the contemptuous looks given him, that he had made a dreadful blunder. The native warriors despised all women; they laughed at the idea that a female could rule over millions of men. In order to restore Queen Victoria in their regard, he retired to a cave and drew with charcoal on the wall a tremendous picture of the Queen in profile, some seven feet high. He crowned her with the feathers of rare birds, drew a gigantic gnarled club for her scepter, gave her a huge nose, which, to the blacks, denoted power. He even exaggerated her biceps. Then he daubed the portrait with vivid splashes of blue, red, and yellow, which gave it a warlike appearance. When he finished, he summoned the blacks to the cave, showed them the image of the ruler of the world; and, after their clicks of amazement had subsided, he sang "God Save the Queen."

However, he used his white man's knowledge not only to bedazzle the blacks but to raise their standard of living. On more than one occasion he saved their lives. Once a prolonged period of drought settled over the bush country. All the water holes dried up. He sank a series of shafts and located several springs. Then he erected windlasses with wooden buckets, keeping alive not only his people but the birds and animals of the region. Daily, emus and hummingbirds, kangaroos and even snakes fifteen feet long, gathered around these water-filled troughs in such numbers that those on the outer edge died from thirst while awaiting their turn to drink. Thus he successfully tided over his people until the rains came.

For thirty years—from 1868 to 1898—he lived among the Australian bushmen, one with them in body and soul. Then

suddenly a series of events jolted him out of this existence. One morning he set off on a journey to meet the chief of a neighboring tribe; when he came across the footprints of camels. Since such animals were unknown to the cannibals, he was seized with a burning curiosity. He followed these tracks. After several days he came upon the remains of an encampment: ashes from a fire, old meat tins. And lying not a few yards away was a newspaper. It was the Sydney *Town and Country Journal,* dated 1876. A veil seemed suddenly to be torn from the past. He sat down and greedily thumbed through the pages. Here were pictures of horse races at Parramatta . . . news of Paris, London . . . stock quotations. Civilization seemed to be reaching out its arms to him. Then, however, he came across one item of news that gave him a start. "The Deputies of Alsace and Lorraine have refused to vote in the German Reichstag." Not knowing, of course, that Germany and France had gone to war in 1870, and that the Germans had annexed Alsace-Lorraine, the statement made absolutely no sense to him. What were the French doing in the German Reichstag? He could scarcely believe his eyes. Finding that he was working himself into a state of terrible nervous excitement, he threw the paper away. But he could not thrust the matter from his mind. He picked up the paper and read the passage a second time. The words had not changed. The frightful thought struck him: he had gone mad among the cannibals, and this newspaper proved it.

He buried his face in his hands. Again and again these words in print screamed through his mind. Only with a tremendous effort of the will was he finally able to recover his equilibrium.

The meat tins and the newspaper signified that white men had begun to invade the Australian bush country. It was only a matter of time before De Rougemont would meet up with them! One morning, while descending a hill with a party of natives, he came without warning upon a valley in which four men rode horseback a couple of hundred yards ahead of him. They were wearing wide sombrero hats, flannel trouser tucked into long riding boots. They were white-skinned!

For an instant De Rougemont froze to the spot, the tears streaming down his cheeks. And then, throwing all discretion to the winds, he rushed forward at the head of his tribesmen, screaming at the top of his voice. The men turned, raised their

rifles, and fired a volley. De Rougemont and his companions dropped quickly to the ground. The whites wheeled around and rode rapidly out of view.

Immediately De Rougemont realized the blunder he had committed. Dressed in paint and feathers, his skin indistinguishable from the other bushmen, he had been mistaken for a native chief leading an attack. A wave of despair swept over him. He was a pariah, an enemy of all Europeans, doomed to be shot at on sight.

Not long after this heartbreaking experience, De Rougemont came across a set of footprints that had been made, not by the naked foot of a native, but by someone wearing boots. The steps zigzagged in such a fashion as to suggest that the owner was drunk, or delirious. De Rougemont followed the tracks for two whole days through the spinifex, coming upon a sombrero hat, a shirt, and a pair of trousers. Finally he reached the man himself, lying naked, face down, his fingers dug into the dirt. De Rougemont moistened his lips with water, rubbed him vigorously; and the faint stirrings of life appeared. The man opened his eyes and struggled to speak. De Rougemont's pulse pounded as he strained to hear this first speech from the lips of a fellow European. But the words that poured forth were a babble. De Rougemont was beside himself. There were so many questions to put to this messenger from the other world.

The moment of rationality never came. The man's gaze wandered vacantly past him. He had lost his reason in the desert sun.

Although he recovered his physical strength sufficiently to accompany De Rougemont back to his tribe, the stranger remained an imbecile. Yet his very imbecility caused the natives to believe that he was possessed by a divine spirit. He was given a hut which was turned into a house of worship, and he was given a wife who adored him and took great pride in the homage accorded him.

One morning she came running to De Rougemont with terror in her eyes. Her husband had fallen onto the floor in a fit. De Rougemont went quickly to the hut, felt the man's pulse, and realized that the end was at hand. And he had a feeling that with the nearness of death the stranger's mind would suddenly clear.

Anxiously he hovered over the limp body, saw the slow

opening of the eyelids. And then his heart missed a beat. For the stranger looked him squarely in the face and asked, "Where the devil am I?"

At first De Rougemont could scarcely trust himself to speak. But after a few moments he replied, "You are in the heart of the bush country, with a white man who like you has lost his way. . . ."

The stranger took no notice of the leathery old countenance before him. He looked beyond. "White man? Lost my way? Giles . . . and Tietkins . . . Where are they?" He passed his hand over his forehead as if to wipe away a nightmare. Slowly fragments of his experience came back to him.

"I'm Alf Gibson," he told De Rougemont. "I was one of a party of four. We had set out from Adelaide to explore the overland route to Fremantle. About thirty miles from 'The Kegs' our water supply ran short. I was sent to find a water hole. I lost my direction and wandered into the desert. The sun must have affected my brain. I've lost all recollections . . ."

As he told his story his face blanched at the horror of it.

De Rougemont said quietly, "Cheer up, my friend. When you recover your strength, we'll both make tracks for civilization."

But the other shook his head. "You, perhaps, not I." And he added scarcely above a whisper, "I'm too . . . damn . . . tired."

Within a few days he passed on. The natives refused to bury a man of his divinity. They covered him with leaves, instead, and laid him to rest in a cave. His wife, according to custom, smeared herself with pipe clay and gashed her face until rivers of blood flowed.

After the death of Gibson, De Rougemont was more than ever determined to find his way back to civilization. His strongest bonds to his tribe had been severed. His boy and girl, frail from birth, had died before they reached their teens. And then Yamba herself had departed.

Having reached his decision, De Rougemont trimmed his luxurious hair, giving his tresses as a souvenir to his people. And then, with a bodyguard of forty natives, he traveled south where Gibson had revealed to him that parties of prospectors were digging for gold. For nine months he journeyed through the bush country, and finally he reached a mining camp, a

settlement of a few hundred tents. He said good-by to the tribesmen and dismissed them. Remembering his previous encounter with the whites, he arranged his hair neatly, threw away his weapons, erased the last traces of tribal paint from his face. And then he walked into the camp.

Six Australians were seated around a fire cooking supper.

"Hello," he called in English. "Have you any room for me?"

At first they were too greatly taken aback to reply. Then one of them cleared his throat and said, "Sure . . . sure, partner, come and sit with us."

There was a long silence, punctuated only by the stirring of the kettle. Then a second one inquired, "Have you been out digging for gold?"

"Yes—and I've been away a very long time."

"Where are your companions?"

"I haven't any. I did my prospecting alone."

The Australians looked at one another. Then a third one put a question. "Did you find gold?"

"Plenty of it. But I've been tramping too long through the heart of the continent to carry it with me." He paused, feeling foolish. And then an impulse got the better of him. "Look here, what year is it?"

One of the prospectors stood up. The man was a lunatic. "See here, we don't want any trouble from you. You look as if you could use a shirt and a pair of trousers and a good night's sleep. You're welcome to these. But when the sun rises, you had better be off."

This, then, was civilization's first reception of De Rougemont. He made his way from one camp to another, braving the gibes of miners who considered him as crazy as a bedbug. Eventually he reached Melbourne, where he worked at several jobs. And then he took passage aboard the *Waikato,* and in 1898 arrived in England. The white-skinned cannibal chief had at last come home to Europe!

In July of that year the *Wide World* magazine published the first installment of Louis de Rougemont's remarkable adventures. The response exceeded all expectations. Within a few days news editors from Spain to Sweden cabled for permission to reproduce the story. Hundreds of thousands of copies of the *Wide World* were gobbled up from the stands. Over-

whelmed by the torrent of letters that poured into the office, the editor made a public statement: "Monsieur de Rougemont begs his friends not to think him discourteous if he is at present obliged through pressure of work to decline all social engagements."

But still the clamor grew. Leading hostesses struggled to obtain De Rougemont for their parties. Vast crowds, recognizing him by his picture, mobbed him as he walked along the street, and special police had to spirit him away. Overnight he had become the chief topic of conversation in every country of Europe. The Dreyfus case, which had previously been causing great excitement, was all but pushed off the front pages of newspapers by this new sensation. France proudly claimed him as one of her greatest sons and announced: "Who said a Frenchman couldn't rule backward peoples!"

John Tussaud, the eminent artist, painted De Rougemont's portrait and exhibited it at a leading gallery. Immaculate in evening clothes, De Rougemont lectured before the august British Association for the Advancement of Science. Invitations to speak poured in from a dozen other learned bodies. The opinion was freely expressed that De Rougemont's contributions to anthropology and sociology would completely revolutionize these sciences.

And then, without warning, a storm broke.

A photograph of De Rougemont had been wired to Australia and reproduced in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*. The following morning a small, elderly woman entered the editor's office waving a copy of the newspaper under his nose.

"What's this nonsense you are printing? This man's name isn't Louis de Rougemont. It's Henri Louis Grin."

The editor's jaw dropped. "His name isn't Louis de Rougemont! How do you know?"

The little woman's small dark eyes blazed like two fiery coals. "How do I know? I'm his wife!"

"His wife!"

"Yes." Suddenly a look of inexpressible sadness came into her face. She looked as though she were going to cry. "That scoundrel," she murmured. "That vagabond. So this is the mischief he has been up to! For years my child and I have been compelled to live on charity while Henri loafed in saloons telling his tall stories. And now, God spare him, he has told

the most impudent fabrication of all. How could anyone honestly believe that my Henri was a cannibal chief!"

"Madam, you mean his entire story is a ——!" The editor couldn't trust himself to utter the word.

"Of course. It's a fraud. He made it all up in his head!"

Suddenly her eyes shone with a curious pride. "My Henri always had a wonderful imagination, you know."

Yes, it was only too true. The whole story had been a dream, the glowing, necessary dream of a frustrated little man.

On the heels of his wife's exposure, numerous other Australians came forward and identified Louis De Rougemont as their old friend and neighbor, Henri Louis Grin. Far from being a cannibal king, Henri, in between periods of shiftlessness with the bottle as his only boss, had been a butler to a wealthy Australian family. Then he took a job as a cook aboard a pearling ship. While working in the galley he absorbed with eager ears the stories of the crew. Suddenly he left the ship and passed from one odd job to another, until he finally wound up as a waiter in a dingy Sydney restaurant. Here his incredible stock of anecdotes and dramatic tall stories made him a favorite among the patrons. They invited him to sit down at their tables and listened to him for hours, completely under his spell.

As luck would have it, one of the diners at this restaurant was an honest-to-God explorer, Harry Stockdale, who had made pioneering expeditions over the little-known Kimberley district in western Australia. Stockdale dearly loved an audience; and when he found that the ingratiating Henri Grin was willing, for a change, to be a listener instead of a spinner of yarns, he was pleased as punch. Indeed, he hadn't the slightest idea that he was being exploited by the little waiter. When Henri expressed the desire to take home the diaries and records of his explorations to study them, Stockdale gladly handed them over. The waiter copied them and saturated himself in all the details.

As the years passed, Henri continued unsuccessfully to seek a living. He invented a garbage exterminator which was a fiasco. He launched numerous other projects whose failures sent him back to the bottle. Finally he abandoned his family altogether. He reached the age of sixty. Ahead lay nothing but a pauper's grave.

And yet, despite his ill fortune, he had one supreme consola-

tion. Whenever life seemed darkest, he took refuge within a world of his own creation—a world in which he was the hero of adventures that brought him the admiration of kings. Using Harry Stockdale's material as a basis for plausibility, he had constructed an epic of adventure that possessed the realism of Defoe with the boldness of the *Arabian Nights.* He had approached several journalists, offering to dictate his "autobiography" to them if they would put it into shape for a book. But they had shied away from the deal.

Finally, in 1898, he managed to work his passage aboard a ship for England. In London, as we have seen, he found an editor who published his story as the truth. It is a classic irony that millions of people implicitly believed every word of it.

But all good things come to an end. When his fraud was exposed, Henri fled to Switzerland to escape the anger of the British public. From thence he sought refuge in the Orient. But the flag of his spirit remained flying. Some time afterward English travelers in India were amazed to find posters all over Natal announcing the appearance at a music hall of Henri Louis Grin, who advertised himself as "The Greatest Liar on Earth." Poor gallant Henri! Exposed as a liar, he now claimed the privilege of being the chief of them all!

THE SECRET OF THE HIGHGATE TOMB

AMONG the real-life mystery thrillers that took place in Victorian England, none gripped the imagination of the people more thoroughly than the Druce case. The Druces of Baker Street first came to the attention of the public in 1898 at the very moment that Sherlock Holmes was performing his miracles of deduction at a nearby address. It is safe to say that the celebrated detective of fiction never met up with an adventure that for sheer excitement surpassed the actual events involving the Druce family—events that held the front pages of the newspapers for an astoundingly long time.

The Druces were solid, respectable tradespeople, typical of the British middle class. Thomas Charles Druce founded a furniture store on Baker Street. In 1864 he passed away, and his oldest son Herbert took over the business. For thirty-four years nothing happened to disrupt the peace of the family. Then suddenly, in 1898, the storm broke.

Mrs. Anna Maria Druce, the daughter-in-law of the deceased merchant, filed a petition with the Lord Chancellor to have the family vault in Highgate Cemetery opened and the coffin of old Mr. Druce examined. She gave an extraordinary reason for her request.

"I want to prove," she told her relatives, "that my father-in-law made a fraudulent will. I don't believe he actually died in 1864, despite the funeral given him. Indeed, I strongly suspect that his body doesn't lie in his coffin."

"Druce doesn't lie in the vault?"

This was like telling the family that the sun no longer set in the heavens.

"No, I'm sure of it," replied Mrs. Druce. "I'm afraid that for thirty-four years we've all been terribly deceived. Old Druce staged a fake funeral and laughed behind our backs. You recall how the men who carried the coffin were amazed at its heavi-

ness although Druce only weighed a hundred and fifty pounds? At the time of the funeral a workman told me that he had been quietly paid for removing lead from a roof. Put two and two together. The answer is obvious. The coffin was loaded with lead!"

"Good heavens, why haven't you declared your suspicions before this?" she was asked.

"Because until now they were only suspicions. But lately I have discovered that no physician signed Druce's death certificate. Now I am certain we were hoaxed. And if you wish to know why he deceived us, prepare yourself for a shock!

"I have facts in my possession that reveal the old gentleman wasn't quite the fellow his family and friends thought him to be. For many years, as a matter of fact, he carried on a double life under our very noses. The Druce we knew was simply one of his roles. When he tired of Druce he killed him off and returned to his other, his real self." Then she released a bombshell. "Actually the man who masqueraded as Druce the Upholsterer was one of the most highly placed gentlemen in the kingdom—in fact, Lord William Cavendish Scott Bentinck, the Fifth Duke of Portland!"

This announcement stunned all England. Druce the furniture dealer, the fifth duke of Portland! No odder blend of personalities could have been imagined. The dukes of Portland were one of England's leading families. The first duke had been a companion of William I. The third duke had twice been Prime Minister. One of the Bentincks had been a leader of Parliament and an intimate of Disraeli. The blood of England, Scotland, Holland flowed through the Bentincks' veins. They possessed 180,000 acres of the richest land in England. Next to the King's, their town and country houses were the most palatial.

And now, like a bolt out of the blue, a daughter-in-law of Thomas Charles Druce charged that the fifth duke, while leading the life devolving on his rank, actually had masqueraded as a furniture dealer, raised a family in Baker Street, and no one had been the wiser.

Small wonder reporters from all the London newspapers flocked to the Druce house to learn further details of the old lady's amazing allegations.

She made a statement to the press which can be summarized as follows: All Englishmen recall that the Fourth Duke of

Portland had two sons who reached maturity. One was Lord William, who inherited the title. The other was Lord John. One afternoon in 1848, Lord John was found dead on the family estate at Welbeck Abbey. He lay face down near the entrance to the deer park, clutching his walking stick in his hand. His death had occurred under suspicious circumstances. The physicians ascribed it to a heart attack. But gossip hinted at another cause. It was rumored that Lord John and his brother had fallen out over a woman; that there had been a series of violent quarrels which reached a climax that tragic afternoon. Dark insinuations were whispered. But officially they went unnoticed. Lord John was laid to rest and there the matter ended. Nevertheless, people noticed that shortly after his brother's death a remarkable change came over Lord William. Hitherto he had been a pleasure-loving young aristocrat. But now, suddenly, he became a recluse. His face took on a haunted look.

"Recently," declared Mrs. Druce, "I have come upon facts that throw more light upon the entire matter. I am convinced that after his brother's death, Lord William, striving desperately to forget his past, absented himself from Welbeck for longer and longer periods of time, during which he came to Baker Street and established himself in the furniture business under the name of Druce. And in this identity he married the woman over whom he and his brother had quarreled. For almost half a century he occupied a substantial position in the world of business. Periodically, with a slight change of appearance, he resumed his life as the duke, hoodwinking the entire peerage. No one saw through the deceit.

"I have further evidence that the so-called Mr. Druce did not really die in 1864," Mrs. Druce continued. "After his supposed burial, several former employees of his at the furniture store came to me scared out of their wits, declaring that they had suddenly come upon Mr. Druce walking in the streets. And one elderly lady almost passed way from the shock she received at seeing what she believed was his ghost.

"Then, too, I must mention another item. It is a matter of record that the fifth duke suffered from a disagreeable skin disease. My youngest daughter is also afflicted with this disease. It is a hereditary ailment."

Such was Mrs. Druce's claim. The stakes were tremendous.

If she were able to prove to the satisfaction of the courts that Druce and the duke were one, her family would not only gain a title but would enter into one of the world's great inheritances. The Portland dukedom, with its vast holdings in England and Scotland, was valued at sixteen million pounds—approximately seventy million dollars!

Obviously the surest way to test the truth of Mrs. Druce's story was to open the Druce vault at Highgate and see if the body of Mr. Druce actually lay there. But an obstacle arose to this. Mr. Herbert Druce, the oldest son of the merchant, filed a petition to prevent what he called "the desecration of my father's grave!" Since Mr. Druce had inherited the ownership of the vault, he was acting within his rights. The courts upheld him.

Partisans of Mrs. Druce accused Herbert Druce of deliberately thwarting justice. They pointed out that, although he had been willed the bulk of his father's property, he had been born before his parents were legally married. If, therefore, Mrs. Druce's claims were proved true, her son, Druce's legal heir, would inherit the Portland estate, and Herbert's rights to a business bringing in an annual income of forty thousand pounds would vanish.

For four years Mrs. Druce used every legal device to have the vault opened. Druce refused to budge from his position. And the mystery of Druce the upholsterer remained unsolved.

In the meantime the newspapers brought to light facts concerning the late Lord William Bentinck, the Fifth Duke of Portland, the target of Mrs. Druce's charges. To tell the truth, the fifth duke's personality served to heighten the mystery. For, Druce or not, he had been the most eccentric nobleman in Europe.

He had lived the life of a hermit on his estate at Welbeck Abbey in the heart of Sherwood Forest. He had never been seen at court. Even his business dealings had been conducted through deputies. His manner of dress had been notorious. Five feet eight inches in height, he sported a giant topper almost two feet tall, wrapped himself, winter or summer, in three overcoats, tied his trousers with a piece of string several inches above his feet. He had such a horror of germs that he refused to handle money. He drove in a hearselike carriage with shuttered windows around which peepholes were arranged in such a

fashion that he could observe what was going on without himself being seen. He never spoke to his servants, but put his orders into writing. None of his help ever dared to say hello to him for fear of being instantly discharged.

But the oddity that most marked the duke out from his fellows had been his mania for tunneling underneath his estate. For seventeen years he had employed close to a thousand masons, carpenters, and engineers and had invested two million pounds starting to build a network of passageways and chambers under the abbey for a distance of fifteen miles. Scorning to live aboveground, he spent most of the time roaming through his subterranean empire—a veritable human mole.

In the center of meadows, on the green bordering highways, even rising from the beds of creeks, visitors were amazed to come upon huge glass bull's-eyes that served as sky lanterns to light his subway chambers. Beneath the grass and azaleas were rooms out of the *Arabian Nights*. There was a luxurious ballroom fifty yards in length, supported by fifty marble pillars, lit by evelen thousand lamps. There was a picture gallery on whose walls hung masterpieces by Reynolds, Holbein, and Van Dyck. Ten years had been spent merely in glazing its crystal ceiling. There was an elaborate museum containing, among other historical treasures, the pearl-drop earrings that had been worn by Charles I on the morning of his execution, and a letter to an ancestor of the duke written by the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, who had been jailed at Welbeck before her execution. There were terraces, balconies, music rooms whose walls were built of a tremendous thickness to withstand the damp and cold. A riding academy with stables covered an area the size of a village, at one end of which had been built a gallop, enclosed under a roof of glass, for the exercise of a hundred horses.

Such was this underground metropolis built to satisfy a nobleman's whim! The duke's neighbors were sorely puzzled. What motive drove him into the gloom of the earth when the countryside above was as magnificent as any in England!

Some called the duke a madman. Others sought the answer in the facts surrounding the death of his brother, at which time the duke was observed to have undergone the remarkable change in his personality referred to by Mrs. Druce. Lord William had been very close to his brother, a celebrated sports-

man whose scarfs and cravats were the talk of the town. John had bred studs for the St. Leger derby and had wagered the heaviest bets of his day. But as he had grown older he had become so thoroughly absorbed in politics that he sold his studs for a song. He made a name for himself in Parliament and won the admiration of Disraeli.

And then suddenly, in the prime of his career, he was struck down. The events surrounding his death were very curious. He had come down to Welbeck Abbey to recuperate from an exhausting session of Parliament. Just a few days before Christmas he had accepted an invitation to spend a couple of days with Lord Manvers, and he set out at four in the afternoon to walk the five miles to Thoresby, the home of his host. His valet drove over to Thoresby to be at his master's service. But the hours passed and Lord John failed to appear. Alarmed, the valet returned to Welbeck, summoned the groom, and they set out with lanterns, following the path Lord John was seen to take. About a mile from the abbey they came upon his body. It was lying very close to a gate which separated a meadow from a deer park. His body was cold and stiff, indicating that he had been dead for hours.

During later questioning a woodman and two peasants declared that earlier that afternoon they had passed about two hundred yards from the spot and had observed Lord John leaning against the gate. At first they had mistaken him for his brother. His head was bent in solitude. One of the party lingered behind to look at him, feeling that there was something very queer about him. The lord looked up but made no sign that he had seen him.

The news of the tragedy reached the nation the following morning. England was plunged into grief. The doctors declared that Lord John's death had been due to heart failure. However, as Mrs. Druce had suggested, tongues kept alive a sinister rumor. They whispered that Lord John and Lord William had for some time been on the outs; that on the fateful afternoon, Lord William had struck his brother a sharp blow on the heart which had caused the death.

"You know," it was murmured, "the reason for the blow was a taunting remark Lord John flung at William in the heat of passion—something he would not have dared utter with a cool head. The duke suffered from a skin disease which he

desperately tried to conceal. That afternoon Lord John said to him that if he continued to press his attentions on a certain woman, he would let the whole world know that *Lord William was a leper!*"

Even those who scorned to believe the gossip were nonetheless baffled by the duke's burrowings underground. What had driven him into the night? Guilt over his brother? The fact that he suffered from a skin disease that had become too loathsome for the sunlight? Be that as it may, the duke lived out his allotted span and died full of years in 1879. He was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery. Since he had never married, the dukedom passed to his cousin, a lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards. And it was the present duke's right to the title that Mrs. Anna Maria Druce was challenging.

To return to Mrs. Druce: As petition after petition to have the family tomb opened was rejected by the courts, she became a victim of hysteria. "I am the rightful Duchess of Portland!" she screamed to her friends. "I demand my inheritance!" She visited Highgate Cemetery daily to spy on the tomb, for she had become obsessed with the notion that Herbert Druce was plotting to remove the coffin and destroy it as evidence. One afternoon she noticed workmen digging a fresh grave. She rushed up to them and demanded that they stop. It took the cemetery officials several hours to convince the old lady that the spot at which the men were digging was more than a hundred yards from the Druce tomb, and that an attempt upon it had not even been thought of.

Finally her mind snapped. She was confined to an asylum. And here she died. But her death did not end the case. On the contrary, matters took an even more surprising turn. New evidence concerning the ubiquitous Mr. Druce was unearthed. It developed that years before the marriage upon which Mrs. Druce had based her claim the merchant had entered into a secret alliance with a woman who bore him a son. This son had departed from England to seek gold in Australia. Here he had died, leaving in turn a son of his own, a Mr. George Hollamby Druce. Now, on the heels of Mrs. Druce's claim, Mr. George Hollamby Druce appeared in England and demanded the dukedom.

To raise money for his suit, he met with a group of businessmen and launched one of the most audacious enterprises on

record. Inviting the public to invest money in his bid for a dukedom, he formed the Druce-Portland Company Ltd. and offered shares which would pay sixty-four shillings for every one subscribed—a return of 6400 per cent!—out of the Portland millions *if he won possession of them!* People from every walk of life jumped at the bait, filling the coffers of the Druce-Portland Company.

The problem now arose how best to proceed with the claim. Even with the money received from the public, a civil suit against the powerful Bentinck family was out of the question. However, there was a less expensive way to force the matter into courts. Mr. Herbert Druce, the present proprietor of the Baker Street business, had sworn that the body of his father rested in the Highgate vault. Mr. George Hollamby Druce decided to bring a charge of perjury against him. For this purpose he engaged one of the most brilliant lawyers in England, Mr. Atherly-Jones, K.P. The defendant countered by retaining Horace Avory, the greatest criminal lawyer of the age. And the public, whose appetite for thrills was insatiable, looked forward to the battle of the legal giants.

The trial opened in the Marylebone police court on October 25, 1907. The courtroom was crowded with spectators. The front benches were packed with the highest-titled men and women in the kingdom. Even the present Duke of Portland was present. Now, at last, the question which had perplexed a nation was to be answered, at least legally. Was Druce the duke?

The tense court buzzed with whispers as a witness from America took the stand.

"What is your name?" asked her counsel.

"Mrs. Robinson."

"Where were you born?"

"On a tobacco plantation in Virginia, owned by my father before the Civil War."

When she was a slip of a girl, she declared, she had met the celebrated novelist Charles Dickens during his trip to America Her father was friendly with Dickens and introduced her to him in Boston. Dickens took a fancy to her. She saw him several times. When she was eighteen she visited England. Her father had died, and she was seeking a job to support her mother. Dickens suggested as a possible employer the Duke

of Portland. "The duke is my friend. He is in need of a private secretary at Welbeck Abbey." He reported to her: "The duke would like to employ you in a confidential capacity. You are to be his secretary for fifteen shillings a week. All the duke's correspondence shall be carried on in your name. And for this purpose he insists that you adopt a fictitious identity."

"And what name did the duke propose?"

"Madame Tussaud!"

A gasp passed through the courtroom.

"You mean he asked you to assume the name of the lady who manages the Chamber of Horrors containing the wax models of the most famous French murderers in history?" declared the counsel.

"Yes," she replied. "I guess it was just a fancy of his."

And then Mrs. Robinson continued. "While engaged at Welbeck Abby, I kept a diary recording my relationship with the duke. I brought this diary all the way from America for this trial, for I felt sure that in my day-to-day impressions of thirty years ago there must be some clues which might provide the court with an explanation of this case. However, a few days before the trial opened, I went shopping. The diary was in my handbag. As I stood looking into a store window, a man suddenly edged up to me and whispered, 'Madame, there is something crawling on your shoulder!' Before I could recover my wits, he had made off with my handbag, diary and all." She paused. "Several days previously another attempt—an unsuccessful one—was made to obtain my diary. I am convinced that certain people interested in this case have employed agents to track it down at all costs."

Amid the deep silence, Mrs. Robinson proceeded to reminisce about the duke. "He was a queer one, you know. He built an entire system of underground chambers. It was not unusual for him to arise suddenly from the mouth of one of his tunnels in the midst of a gang of workers, spy on their labor for a moment, and just as suddenly disappear into the earth again. He had a trap door built in his study from which he could secretly let himself down into his passageways, so that the servants never knew at any moment whether he was aboveground or underground."

She declared that the duke would often disappear from the abbey for long periods of time, during which it was explained

that he had gone to London for business. On the roof of Lord William's town house, she told, was a glass shelter in which a coffin rested, ready to receive him when he died; for Lord William, among other theories, had a horror of being lowered into the earth. "When I am dead, I will lie on my roof. I want a lot of fresh air!"

She further stated that upon the duke's returns from London his friend, Charles Dickens, with a mysterious smile, would refer to him as "The Lord of Resurrection." "He is one man in two bodies."

Counsel for the prosecution produced two old photographs and asked the witness to study them. One was a picture of the Duke of Portland; the other, of Mr. Thomas Charles Druce as he had been known on Baker Street.

"Do you recognize these photographs?"

"Yes," replied the witness emphatically. "Both are pictures of the duke, except that in one of them he is wearing a beard!"

Hardly had the courtroom recovered from the impact of Mrs. Robinson's testimony when a second witness from America took the stand to give evidence concerning the duke.

"What is your name?"

"Robert Caldwell."

Caldwell testified that years ago he had suffered from a disagreeable skin disease. He had gone to leading specialists in America and England, who told him that the malady was incurable. However, word came to him of a British army physician in India who had developed a cure. The doctor undertook to treat him, and within two months the skin disorder had completely vanished. "I paid him five thousand pounds for the secret of the cure."

Upon returning to England he had gone to Sir Morell Mackenzie, the distinguished medical man. Mackenzie was greatly impressed with his story. "Caldwell," he confided, "I have a close friend who suffers from your ailment. He is the Duke of Portland. His illness has made his face unsightly. Perhaps your cure will succeed with him."

"I agreed to try it. And I was introduced to the duke at Welbeck Abbey. The cure was attempted. The duke's condition improved greatly. We became intimate friends."

The witness paused and then continued. "During the course of this intimacy I discovered that His Grace was leading a

double existence. You no doubt recall his town residence, Harcourt House, the mansion whose magnificent garden he enclosed with a screen to conceal it from the eyes of his neighbors. From this residence he had constructed a tunnel a half mile in length, under the busiest section of London, to a furniture store on Baker Street. In a matter of minutes, with the assumption of a false beard, he became Mr. Druce the merchant. Why he created this double existence for himself I could never discover. But I do know that he eventually wearied of Druce and decided to put an end to him. One day he summoned me.

" 'Caldwell,' he said, 'Druce must die; I want you to hire a carpenter to build a coffin loaded with two hundred pounds of brass and sheet lead. I'll have the finest funeral ever seen in these parts. There are five thousand pounds waiting for you if you carry out my instructions to the letter.' I went to a carpenter and ordered a coffin. Two days later the funeral was held. Fifty carriages accompanied a pile of brass and lead to the grave! I last saw the duke at Welbeck in 1865. Afterward I left for America. Recently, through the newspapers, I read of the claim put forward by members of the Druce family, and I have come to England to tell my story."

Other witnesses now came forward to corroborate the case for the prosecution, some of whom had known the duke, others Druce: a Mrs. Hamilton, at whose birth the duke had served as godfather; the duke's tailor; a housemaid and gardener at Welbeck; a photographer; a fish peddler; and a carpenter on Baker Street.

The trial was drawing speedily to a conclusion when suddenly a new and unexpected development occurred. Mr. Druce, the defendant, through his lawyers, made an announcement that provided the greatest sensation of all. "Under the present circumstances, after taking counsel with my conscience, I have decided to give permission for the opening of my father's grave!"

For ten years England had been awaiting this declaration. The press flashed the news in headlines. Courtroom proceedings were halted. The lawyers conferred, and a date was set for the opening of the vault: the thirtieth of December.

Several days before the digging commenced, a huge monument covering the grave was removed, and a wooden shed was

erected over it so that only properly authorized persons would be able to witness the excavation.

And now the anxiously awaited morning arrived. Hours before dawn an excited mob milled around the gates of the cemetery. The north wind whistled; columns of icy rain beat down. Yet people came from all directions to brave the weather. Finally, at five in the morning, the gates were opened. But not to admit the thousands who implored entrance—merely to pass through a team of electricians who had arrived to illuminate the shed. Then a covered van motored into the cemetery. It carried workers with the necessary tools for prying open the lid of the coffin. Physicians appointed by the court were admitted next. Reporters entered with their credentials. But a patrol of London bobbies guarded the gates against the curious.

Operations commenced before the first light of day. Before a hushed gathering, the workers spread a tarpaulin across the floor of the shed. The molding of the vault had already been broken. Now men with crowbars lifted up the massive flagstone which covered the tomb and removed it on rollers. This done, the upper tier of the vault was exposed down to the marble slats and York stones which formed the second tier.

On the left-hand side rested the coffin of Mrs. Druce. Excavators lowered a ladder, descended with electric lamps, passed ropes beneath this coffin, and hoisted it to the surface. Next they dug up the heavy slabs covering the casket; underneath lay the coffin of old Mr. Druce, the object of their search.

All eyes were fixed upon this coffin, on whose contents hinged the fate of a dukedom. In appearance it was plain enough, a casket of the old-fashioned type, covered with cloth and studded with brass nails. The name plate was obscured by heavy dust and lime. One of its six handles had come off; the cloth was frayed; the edge of the lid worn. Ropes were placed around it, and slowly it was hauled to the surface.

And now the final operation. Not a soul stirred. The shed was as silent as the grave below. The lid was unscrewed with powerful pliers. A second, inner coffin was exposed. The workmen cut through the lead of this upper surface. Off came the lid, bringing away with it the top of the innermost shell. And suddenly, before the group of observers, appeared the body of

Thomas Charles Druce, the upholsterer of Baker Street. It had been preserved for thirty-four years in chloride of lime!

The rest of the story can be told briefly. With the discovery of Druce's body in its proper resting place, the claim to the dukedom collapsed. What of the charge that the duke and Druce were one? Perhaps Anna Maria Druce, whose delusions forced her into an asylum, actually believed her extraordinary fiction. Certainly the well-known eccentricities of the fifth duke, his noticeable resemblance to Mr. Druce in photographs, made him an ideal subject around which to weave such a legend. And Mr. George Hollamby Druce, who subsequently came upon the scene, exploited the gullibility of the public, its desire for the romantically improbable, to press his impudent claim.

Caldwell and Mrs. Robinson played a vital part in the conspiracy. Their testimony was a complete fraud supported by a cast of credulous dupes. Caldwell escaped the arm of British law by fleeing to America, only to die in an insane asylum. But Mrs. Robinson, who had doubtless offered her lies in the hope of receiving a handsome share of the Portland millions, was convicted and sent to prison.

And so ended one of the most remarkable frauds of the ages —a gamble for a dukedom that failed.

BETRAYAL IN VIENNA

VIENNA in 1913 was a city of spring madness. In cafés along the Ring, journalists sipped strong Turkish coffee and analyzed the latest gossip from Franz Joseph's court. Women with clever coiffures promenaded the length of the boulevards on the arms of their husbands and lovers, taking deep lungfuls of air, so welcome after hours spent in the steaming beauty salons. Everywhere tunes were whistled—snatches of Mozart and Strauss—by janitors who swept the office entrances, by cabdrivers with luxurious mustaches who cracked the whip over prancing bays, by couples emerging from St. Stephen's Cathedral after an interlude of prayer.

But there were two men in this city, the twenty-fourth of May, who did not whistle a tune. They were two little men with puckered faces from which all the juices of life seemed to have been sucked. As they sat in the lobby of the Hotel Klomser, diagonally across from the clerk's counter, they peered, from time to time, over their newspapers with an alertness which betrayed that they were not casual loungers.

Suddenly the lines about their mouths tightened. A flashily dressed, dark-complexioned individual with small eyes that shifted restlessly over a sharply pointed nose and a large sensual mouth walked over to the clerk's counter and handed in his room key. He was about to make for the exit when the porter called: *"Mein Herr,* does this belong to you?" He held out the sheath of a pocketknife.

The guest glanced at it. "Why, yes, it is mine." He took it with the air of a man attending to a trifle. But suddenly his fingers stopped in the act of traversing the arc to his trousers.

"Where did you find it?" Before the porter could reply, he answered his own question—abruptly, as if he were giving a command. "Naturally, I dropped it on my way to the room."

His eyes darted uneasily about the lobby. For an instant they met the glance of the two wizened little men. It was as if swords crossed. Not a muscle in three faces moved.

Then the owner of the pocketknife casually lit a cigarette, strolled out of the lobby, turned right, and walked down the Herrengasse in the direction of the Café Central. The watchers put aside their newspapers. One of them followed him. The other rushed to a telephone.

"Give me twelve, three, forty-eight," he said briskly.

It was the number of the Austro-Hungarian Secret Police.

The call was instantly put through.

"Herr Captain Ronge? We have located our man . . . at the Hotel Klomser."

"Fine! Have you identified him?"

"Yes." The detective spoke a name scarcely above a whisper.

There was a sudden silence as if the line had gone dead. Then the voice at the other end exploded. *"Verdammt!* Are you sure? I can't believe it. Do not let him out of your sight. Follow him to the ends of the earth if necessary!"

Captain Ronge hung up, leaned back in his chair, and blew from his lips a cloud of smoke as his mind organized itself for action.

The headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Secret Service was located in the Stubenring. Its exterior was indistinguishable from dozens of other façades. No policeman patrolled the entrance. No sign claimed the attention of the passer-by. Few people suspected what took place within its walls.

Yet this building of nondescript appearance was the eyes and ears of an empire that stood at the crossroads of Europe. Here, behind closed doors, the cleverest minds of the nation sifted intelligence reports that poured in from all the capitals of the world. An obscure killing in an Athens alley, the sudden rise of securities on the Paris Exchange, the changing of one favorite demimonde for another by a cabinet minister in Istanbul, the building of a new Italian destroyer, the heavy gambling of an important left-wing journalist in Buenos Aires—all these were analyzed microscopically for their significance in the pattern of world events. In the spring of 1913, just fifteen months before the outbreak of the first World War, the intelligence bureaus of the Entente Cordiale and the Central Powers were

beehives of activity. The destiny of nations hung on a calculated guess.

In an obscure wing of this building in the Stubenring were the offices of the K.S., the Kundschafte Stelle. This was the department of espionage and counterespionage. Visitors to the K.S. on business would have been astounded to know the true extent of its security measures. As one sat in the outer office awaiting his appointment he would have been amazed to discover, for instance, that the unexciting paintings on the wall opposite him had apertures through which the lenses of cameras immortalized his face, for the convenience of a file. And when one was admitted to the presence of an official, he would never have guessed that the telephone which had so spontaneously interrupted the conversation had actually been rung by the man facing him, simply by pressing a concealed button. During the dummy phone talk the official would glance casually in the direction of his visitor, indicate a cigarette case, and suggest a smoke. If the guest accepted his invitation, he would register his fingerprints, thanks to a preparation of minium, on the matchbox, the cigarette case, and the ash tray. And every word spoken would be recorded on a phonograph disk.

The ruthless efficiency of the Kundschafte Stelle was due largely to the talents of a single individual—Colonel Alfred Redl. Born of obscure parentage, Redl had entered the army at an early age and had risen rapidly. He was an expert linguist. He had personal acquaintance with every country in Europe. For five years he had been chief of Intelligence, the very soul of the Austro-Hungarian Secret Service. He had caught some of the cleverest spies on the continent, had wrested from the Great Powers their most zealously guarded secrets.

As a reward for his service with the K.S., Redl had been promoted to the rank of colonel and detailed as chief of staff of the 9th Army Corps stationed at Prague. And his sucessors at the K.S. carried on in his tradition. Whenever a problem arose, Captain Ronge, the new chief and his ablest pupil, would ask himself, "How would Redl have attacked this?" The motto at the Kundschafte Stelle was "Remember Redl!"

In 1908 European intrigue reached new heights. The Western Powers sent large numbers of spies into Austria-Hungary. Since the need for tighter security measures was essential, Captain

Ronge organized a censorship bureau, the Black Post, to intercept messages from all border areas known to be enemy espionage bases. Publicly he stated that the Black Post had been established to deal with customs smugglers. Only four people knew its real purpose. Captain Ronge prided himself in the belief that it had been conceived in the spirit of Alfred Redl.

It happened that early in March 1913 two envelopes addressed to the General Post Office in Vienna came to the attention of the Black Post. One envelope contained six thousand kronen, the other eight thousand kronen. No letter was enclosed; no name had been signed. This immediately gave rise to suspicion. If the money had been sent as the result of a legitimate business transaction, why was there no letter or signature accompanying it? Another suspicious detail: the envelopes had been postmarked from the town of Eydtkuhnen, on the Russian-German border. Eydtkuhnen was a notorious jumping-off area for enemy spies. Clearly these envelopes merited the most careful investigation.

Ronge ordered his counterespionage agents into action. Sooner or later someone would call at the post office for these envelopes. Fourteen thousand kronen would not lie unclaimed indefinitely. There was a police station across the street from the post office, in the Fleischmarkt. Intelligence agents ran a wire from the post office to this station. The postal clerks were instructed to press a button and signal the police the instant the envelopes were called for. Furthermore, they were ordered to detain the caller by every conceivable ruse until the arrival of the police.

March passed into April, and April into May. And no one turned up for the money. Then finally, on May twenty-fourth, the eighty-third day of the watch, the signal suddenly buzzed in the police station. Unfortunately, one of the K.S. agents was out of the room at the moment. The other was washing his hands. After some delay, however, they sprinted across the Postgasse and entered the post office—too late by a matter of seconds.

"A man called for the envelopes," exclaimed a clerk. "I couldn't detain him a moment longer."

"What did he look like?"

"I couldn't make out his face clearly. He wore a light spring

topcoat turned up at the collar; the brim of his hat was down."

The detectives hurried into the street in time to see a cab drive by and turn the corner. There was none other in sight. To follow was impossible. For fully twenty minutes the detectives stood in the street cursing one another for their delay. Then an extraordinary piece of luck occurred. In the midst of their argument a cab passed slowly. The horse was at a walk.

"Halt that cab!" cried out one of the detectives suddenly. "I could swear that's the driver who took our man. I got a look at him the last time he passed!"

They stopped the cab. "Are you the fellow who picked up a passenger at the post office about twenty minutes ago?"

"Ja, meine Herren!"

"Where did you go?"

"To the Kaiserhof Café."

"To the Kaiserhof, then!" The detectives jumped into the cab. The driver snapped his whip and they were off.

On the way, one of the K.S. agents, trailing his hand by accident along the seat cushion, felt an object at his fingertips. He snatched it up. It was a gray suède knife sheath. It had evidently been dropped carelessly by someone sitting in the cab before him. Did it belong to the man they hunted? He pocketed it for future reference.

When they arrived at the Kaiserhof Café they found it practically deserted. The cabman was unable to point out his fare.

The detectives alighted and took counsel. Most likely the passenger had doubled on his tracks, changed cabs, and taken off in a new direction. Across from the Kaiserhof was a cabstand. Here the detectives inquired whether a man wearing a light spring topcoat had alighted from a cab at the Kaiserhof within the past twenty minutes and hailed any of the drivers at this stand.

Several of the cabmen shook their heads in the negative. But one fellow whose face was swollen with acne spoke up. "Hold on. I drove the man you describe—to the Hotel Klomser."

"Take us there," ordered the detectives.

Upon arriving at this hotel, the K.S. agents walked over to the chief clerk at the counter. They showed him their cards.

"Have any guests arrived within the past half hour?"

"Ja, meine Herren."

One of the detectives presented the knife sheath. "Summon

these guests to the lobby. Ask each one if he has lost this sheath."

"Ja wohl."

The clerk spoke into the phone. The K.S. agents picked up newspapers and seated themselves.

Within a couple of minutes the first guest appeared. As he quietly examined the gray suède knife cover and declared, "Why, yes, it is mine," the detectives could scarcely credit their eyes and ears. They were stunned as if by an electric shock. For the man who acknowledged ownership of the case was their former teacher and boss of the Kundschafte Stelle—Colonel Alfred Redl!

As Redl lit a cigarette and walked out of the lobby, one of the K.S. men rushed over to the telephone to report the unbelievable discovery to Captain Ronge. Then he joined his fellow detective, who had already fallen into pace behind Redl in the Herrengasse. Various explanations of the colonel's extraordinary conduct raced through the minds of each detective. It was impossible that the former chief of Intelligence was a spy! No, the colonel had undoubtedly received these envelopes as a favor for a friend in a confidential business matter.

Suddenly, however, they stopped speculating and attended to facts. Redl had turned the corner of the Stauchgasse. A half minute later, when the detectives reached the corner, he was nowhere to be seen. Ahead lay the Wallnerstrasse. It was empty. The next open thoroughfare was almost two hundred yards away. Clearly, Redl could not have reached it and turned down it in the thirty seconds available to him. There was only one answer. He had dodged into the old Exchange Building across the street to give them the slip.

The Exchange Building had three exits. Two led into the Café Central. One led through a passageway into the Platz Freiung. The detectives were forced to make an immediate decision. Which exit should they take? *Verdammt!* If a man were conscious of being followed, he would not turn into a café. He would continue along the thoroughfares. Acting on this hunch, the detectives sprinted through the exit leading to the large open square of the Freiung. They had guessed right. Ahead of them was the erect figure of Redl walking slowly across the square.

The colonel lit another cigarette and quickened his pace. The detectives did likewise. Redl turned down the Tiefengraben, tossed away his cigarette. Suddenly he took from his pocket a handful of papers. Without glancing at them or breaking his stride, he tore them into little pieces and scattered them on the sidewalk. The detectives refused to fall for the ruse. Had they stopped to pick up the pieces, Redl would have turned the following corner and vanished. They calculated that only a man sensing a desperate situation would drop evidence on the sidewalk which might possibly be used against him. Unquestionably the colonel was willing to take any gamble to elude them.

Now they approached the Konkordia Platz. One of the detectives continued to follow Redl across the intersection, but the other hailed a cab and drove back to the spot along the Tiefengraben where the colonel had scattered the papers. He collected as many pieces as he could find and put them into an envelope. "To the Stubenring!"

Several minutes later he was in an office of the Kundschafte Stelle, where he handed the envelope to Captain Ronge. Within half an hour the various scraps of paper had been successfully pieced together. They disclosed the truth. They were receipts for three registered letters, the first to Brussels, the second to Lausanne, the third to Warsaw. Brussels was the headquarters of the French and Russian Secret Service in western Europe. Lausanne was the headquarters for the Italian Secret Service. Warsaw was the chief listening post for the Entente Cordiale in the East.

Grimly, Ronge reached up and selected a manuscript from one of his shelves. It bore the title *Advice on Espionage Detection,* and it had been written by Alfred Redl as a basic guide for all K.S. agents. It was a summary of his own experiences as a spy catcher. Considered too confidential to be sent to a printer, the manuscript had been preserved in Redl's original handwriting. Captain Ronge now compared this with the writing on the torn receipts. The last shred of doubt vanished. The man who more than anyone else had developed the Austro-Hungarian Secret Service was in the pay of foreign powers!

Half an hour later General August Urbanski von Ostromiecz entered the dining room of the Hotel Grand. His face was flushed with excitement. He sent his card to General Conrad von Hoetzendorff, chief of the Imperial Army, who was at a

table with friends. The commander in chief excused himself and was drawn into a corner by Von Ostromiecz, who, in an undertone, told him the incredible story. For several minutes Von Hoetzendorff remained silent. All the blood had been drained from his countenance. Others before Redl had sold out to the enemy, but never the chief of the Secret Service, the man with every last secret at his fingertips. It was a national catastrophe!

Then Von Hoetzendorff spoke. "Has he been arrested?"

"He is being followed. He can be seized at any moment."

The face of the commander had assumed its professional impassivity.

"Von Ostromiecz, you must learn from his own lips the extent of his betrayal—and then . . ."

"I understand," said the other. "Then he must be disposed of."

Von Hoetzendorff nodded. "I will transmit to you sealed orders detailing the manner in which we shall dispose of him. You will hand these orders over to four trusted officers. The army shall issue a statement regretting the suicide of the brilliant young Colonel Redl—a suicide brought on by overwork. We shall bury him with full military honors. And the world shall never learn the truth."

Alfred Redl looked into the mirror that hung in a pawnbroker's window at a busy intersection leading to the Heinrichgasse. There was no doubt of it—weaving their way intently through the crowd were the same two sharp-faced little men with eyes that seemed to pierce a hole through his spine. They were still following him.

Ach! What a sinister business on an afternoon like this! All around him people were finishing their business of the day, thinking pleasantly of the evening that awaited them. In a few hours Vienna would sparkle under thousands of lights and sway to the music of the waltz. But where in this life-giving city could he hide from two plodding, patient little harbingers of death? Wherever he took refuge, two pairs of rat's eyes would ferret him out—eyes as efficient as high-powered searchlights. *Feh!* These grubby, effective little men! They stepped up their pace when he did, turned right, turned left as he did—shadow men released by a button, controlled by an electric eye, clinging to him for all the world like a poisonous chemical.

He turned the problem over in his mind. He knew that he would not be taken in the streets in broad daylight, for the K.S. would not risk a public scene involving one of the best-known officers in Vienna. No, they would close in at night, after they had cornered him in some secluded spot. He must evolve a plan for eluding these shadows. He must make a break for the forests and head for the Italian frontier. True, the border patrols would be alerted. But at least he would have a fighting chance. It would be better than surrendering without a struggle. His face grew hot with excitement at the prospect of the chase. He would escape into Italy and proceed to Rome. He would live comfortably on funds he had already smuggled out of Austria. He would never want for comfort, even for luxury. And the past would be forgotten like a horrible dream.

But then he jerked himself into reality. His hands bent double. His head grew painfully clear. There was absolutely no hope for him. These little men behind him and others would hound him remorselessly wherever he went. Every hour would be a lifetime of fear. And sooner or later a knife thrust in an alley, a shot in a hotel room or café—and it would be all over with him, just as surely as though he had been sentenced by a military court in Vienna.

Now that he had faced these facts squarely, he walked with an almost buoyant step. The mild wind, so characteristic of the city at this season, filled him with a delicious languor. Suddenly he realized that he had made a circuit and was returning to his hotel. He glanced at his watch. It was half-past five.

As he entered the lobby a distinguished-looking gentleman in a dinner jacket stepped forward and shook him warmly by the hand. "Good evening, Alfred. Have you forgotten? We dine at the Riedhof tonight."

He was Dr. Victor Pollack, an eminent lawyer and a close friend. The two had worked on many a spy case together.

Redl returned the handshake. He turned slightly. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the two detectives enter the lobby and settle themselves behind newspapers. They would hound him to the ends of the earth, if necessary. . . . Beads of sweat stood on his forehead.

"*Ja,* Victor," he mumbled. "If you will excuse me, I will change into my dinner clothes."

It had commenced ten years ago, this betrayal of his country; one fall morning, in fact, in 1903, when Redl sat working in his office, just a few months after he had been appointed chief of the Kundschafte Stelle. He was relaxing for several minutes from the pile of papers in front of him when an aide announced that Major Ramovsky, a member of the Russian Embassy, wished to see him.

Redl knew Ramovsky well. In the cosmopolitan life of a great city the officers of the various armies mix socially. The Russian and he had developed a fondness for one another. They had been companions over many a bottle. But ever since his appointment to this new, confidential post Redl had not met the Russian. Indeed, he had gone out of his way not to associate with him. It gave him quite a start, therefore, to learn that Ramovsky was paying a visit this morning to the Kundschafte Stelle.

"Show him in."

In a few moments the powerfully built officer with the close-cropped hair and mouse-gray businesslike eyes stood before him. His face was distinctly not jovial today. Instinct told Redl to turn off the recording machine that ordinarily registered every word spoken by a visitor. He sensed that the interview would be highly personal and unpleasant.

The Russian began affably enough. "Well, old boy, one sees that you have made a great advance since we last drank cognac together, eh?" For a moment he puffed on a cigarette. Then he glanced at Redl shrewdly. "I miss the old times. Don't you?"

"I no longer have the leisure for such things, Ramovsky. They are a thing of the past."

"So!" said the Russian. "You do not go to the Café Ramboul, then, on your own?"

He suddenly sat down with his hands upon his knees and leaned forward. "See here, Redl, I have not come to chat idly with an old companion of the fleshpots. I am here to make you a proposition."

"A proposition?"

"Yes, on behalf of my country, which I serve devotedly." He paused and examined the cigarette smoldering between his fingers. "Redl, I wonder what price you are willing to pay to have a secret well kept?"

Redl gripped the edge of his desk. His fingertips went white.

"What are you hinting at, Ramovsky?"

"I am suggesting, my friend, that you cannot detach yourself from certain facts of your life."

Redl rose from his seat and looked squarely into the other's eyes. "What are you threatening me with?"

"I'll not beat about the bush, Redl. I have come to demand payment for keeping silent about certain matters with which we are both thoroughly familiar. You have worked hard to get where you are today. I would be the last person in the world to want to destroy a brilliant career. And yet one can't always follow one's desires."

He paused, and as Redl made no answer he continued. "Suppose that I were compelled to go to your superiors and tell them about the shocking condition of the chief of the Kundschafte Stelle? Suppose I revealed to them that you were hopelessly in the power of drugs, that you visited certain dens regularly and mixed with the scum of the earth? Suppose I disclosed details about you that would stun your countrymen?" He crushed the stub of his cigarette vigorously and lit another. "Just imagine if I were to inform General von Hoetzendorff that the top secrets of his country were in the hands of an addict!"

For a few moments there was silence. Then Redl spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. "You wouldn't dare tell, Ramovsky. You know that if I took your threat seriously, you would not leave this building alive."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders. "What does one life matter more or less? By killing me you would accomplish nothing. I have already filed with my Embassy the complete record of your . . . adventures. Up till now you have managed to conceal this existence very successfully from your colleagues, the men who are in a position to further your career. However . . ." He opened and shut his large hands in a powerfully prehensile gesture and looked slyly at the chief of the Kundschafte Stelle, whose face had turned ashen.

"Come, my friend, you are a man of the world. You are aware that nations as well as individuals have a price for sealing their lips."

Without taking his eyes off Ramovsky, Redl demanded, "Explain yourself."

"My government asks you to submit periodically for its

inspection the military plans of the Austro-Hungarian High Command. You can deliver this data without the slightest risk to yourself, for your position places you above suspicion."

"I see," said Redl calmly. "You want me to destroy my country?"

"Herr Redl, I wouldn't put it so drastically," replied the Russian. "At any rate, no price is too great to save your reputation. When war comes, who will have the time or the inspiration to investigate the secret career of Alfred Redl? Not even historians ferret out the real reasons why wars are lost or won. And as for your conscience? Bah! Would it be better to be cashiered by the Viennese, who now adore you, simply because they are too narrow-minded to tolerate a gentleman's weakness for drugs?"

He paused and closely scrutinized his brightly polished nails. "Speaking of drugs, Herr Redl, I think it only fair to give you a bit of information. With the funds my government has placed at my disposal, I have established certain very interesting contacts with the underground drug peddlers in Central Europe. I am happy to announce that I have brought them to reason—for a price. Hereafter, Herr Redl, the opium you crave so desperately will be under my control—alone! Whether I distribute a single grain to you will depend entirely upon yourself."

He held out his hand with a smile. "Come, my friend, you are much too sensible to commit suicide. May I have the pleasure of congratulating you on a wise decision?"

So that was how the Russian military intelligence baited its biggest catch. Three days after Colonel Ramovsky's visit, Redl delivered the plans for the German-Austro-Hungarian military operations in the Thorn region. In the weeks and months that followed, charts, photographs, maps, mobilization orders were transmitted.

And then, finally, the Russians demanded—and received—the top secret of the Austrian General Staff, the celebrated Plan 3 for the invasion of Serbia by the armies of the dual monarchy. Every last detail was disclosed—the areas of mobilization, the numbers of forces to be deployed, the points of attack. When General von Hoetzendorff finally discovered the betrayal of Plan 3, it was too late to develop anything but variations of it. The enemy had already been given an X-ray insight into the mind of the High Command. As a result of the

transmission of this plan to Russia, and from thence to Marshal Putnik, the brilliant commander of the Serbian Army, the Serbs were prepared to exact a frightful price for the Austrian onslaught. Serbia became a charnel house heaped with the corpses of Redl's countrymen.

There were monthly meetings of Redl and the Russian in parks, side streets, remote cafés. During one such rendezvous Ramovsky declared: "Redl, a matter has been placed before me by my superiors. They feel that it is to our interest at this time for you to solidify your position before your countrymen. We are going to arrange an opportunity for you to stage a sensational espionage trial during which you will be able to demonstrate your brilliant technique at counterespionage—and, of course, your patriotism. There remains only the business of supplying the spy." He cleared his throat. "We have decided to hand over to you one of your countrymen who for years has been spying for us under your nose. Lately, however, he is of no service to my country. The rascal fled to Brazil. Extradite him. I will furnish you with all the documents necessary to convict him. And mind you—involve no name but his!"

And so, a few weeks afterward, all Vienna was shocked to learn that Herr Hekailo, an Austro-Hungarian ex-army clerk living in Brazil, had been extradited and was to go on trial for betraying his country to Russia.

In court, Redl astonished everyone by producing, as if by magic, the most damaging letters, photographs, and other documents of guilt. "But, Major," cried out the defendant in a sweat, "how could you obtain this so-called evidence of my guilt unless some high-ranking Austro-Hungarian officer had secret dealings with the Russians from who he obtained the documents?"

This remark went unheeded by the judges. Little did Hekailo realize how close he had come to the truth. Finally, pressed to the wall, he disclosed the names of two accomplices, Major von Wienchowsky and Captain Acht. All three were found guilty and sentenced.

Immediately after the trial, while the praises of his associates were ringing in his ears, Redl was summoned peremptorily to a meeting with Ramovsky. The Russian was livid with anger. "Herr Redl, you have blundered inexcusably. We asked you to confine your prosecution to Herr Hekailo. But

you have dragged into the proceedings Wienchowsky and Acht. They are two of our top agents. You have sacrificed not only the guinea pig but the stars as well!"

"Those things happen," replied Redl. "I can assure you I did not foresee whom Hekailo would implicate. I did not even know these others were involved."

"But it is your business to foresee developments!" exploded the Russian. "My government is furious with you. In times like this we cannot afford to lose our chief sources of information."

Suddenly his anger subsided. He took Redl by the arm. "There is a way, however, by which you can atone for your blunder." His tone was almost a purr. "It is an eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. Since you have taken Wienchowsky and Acht from us, I must demand that you turn over within twenty-four hours the number-one agent working for you in Russia—with enough evidence so that we can sentence him and set an example to others!"

Redl jerked himself from the Russian's grasp. "Do you realize what you are asking?"

"Perfectly."

"It is one thing for me to hand over military secrets. It is quite another matter to hand over a human life. My agents are my countrymen, working directly under my orders. I cannot betray them in cold blood!"

The Russian laughed sarcastically. "Really I should never have suspected you of sentimentality!"

Redl continued, his face white with passion: "Till now I have done everything you have ordered, Ramovsky. I have groveled before you—God knows how I have groveled. But this I will not do. This I will not do!"

The Russian took a deep breath. "In that case, I must take an immediate trip to General von Hoetzendorff with a dossier on Herr Colonel Redl."

For a few moments neither spoke. Then Redl said, "Very well. I must compliment you on your methods. I shall hand over to you within the prescribed time a major on the general staff in Warsaw, together with the necessary documents to send him before a firing squad. He is our number-one man in the East." He lit a cigarette. "It will doubtless please you to learn that he is also one of my closest comrades! . . ."

It had been difficult to turn Miecowsky over to the firing

squad. But the second victim was easier. And, after that, it bothered his conscience not at all. In the giant game of power politics being played on the chessboard of Europe, what was a human life? Furthermore, for betraying his countrymen to the Russians, Redl received a fortune.

So the years passed. Gradually he managed to cure himself of his addiction to drugs, but never of his dependency upon the Russians. Even after he left the Kundschafte Stelle he maintained his contacts with Intelligence and continued in his role as the Tsar's chief foreign spy. He drove four expensive automobiles. In the cellar of his mansion in Prague he kept a hundred and sixty bottles of the finest French champagnes.

For ten years he had played this dangerous game of double-dealing with an adroitness that was incomparable. He drew great satisfaction from the knowledge that he was helping to rearrange the affairs of the world. He looked forward to each new betrayal with profound excitement. Each of his maneuvers had worked out to perfection—until now, on the twenty-fourth of May, 1913, when, calling for the envelopes containing fourteen thousand kronen from his Russian paymasters, he had committed the unpardonable error of losing the sheath of his pocketknife in the taxi. He, the cleverest secret agent in Europe! Why, he would have cashiered the rawest recruit in the service for such an elementary blunder! Life is terribly malicious. . . .

And now, on the final evening of his life, Alfred Redl sat in the private dining room of the Hotel Riedhof, picking absent-mindedly at his oysters and Westphalian ham while Dr. Victor Pollack chatted without interruption. As the hours passed, Redl's tension mounted to an almost unendurable pitch. He turned over in his mind the possible ways in which he might die at the hands of the Kundschafte Stelle. Never before had he given so much thought to the manner of his exit from the world. He was cold all over.

The final sips of coffee washed down the pastry. The check was paid. He shook hands with Dr. Pollack in the street. "*Auf Wiedersehen,* Victor."

"*Auf Wiedersehen,* Alfred."

He made his way toward his hotel through streets that were practically deserted. The lamplights threw checkered patches of

gold across the pavement. From half-opened windows bursts of laughter reached his ears. A human shape loomed up in front of him with such suddenness that his heart stopped beating.

"*Mein Herr,* a match if you please. . . ." A face swollen with alcohol looked up at him. Lips half sunken in a growth of blue-black stubble muttered "*Danke schön*" as Redl lit the cigarette that dangled between them. In another instant the hobo had stumbled off into the darkness. Redl looked after him with deep, desperate envy. Tomorrow this bum would be alive. And he . . . ?

He reached his hotel. He scarcely heard the music, the buzz of gaiety that greeted him from the terrace as he walked, in a kind of stupor, across the lobby. He passed excitingly beautiful women on their way to intimate tables with men, seeking the distraction of the hour. No one bothered to read the panic in his face. He entered his room, Number One, lighted the lamp on his writing desk, and walked over to his dresser. He took out a bottle of whisky and a tumbler. He poured himself a drink, then another and another. The room commenced to reel. The lamp on his desk threw an ellipse of light on the ceiling that spun around him like a supernatural white eye. He gripped his dresser as though it were an anchor and looked into the pier-glass mirror just above it. His eyes, as they peered back at him, steadied him.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door. He stood rigid. The knocking was repeated. Then the door opened. Four men dressed in the uniform of Austrian officers walked into the room. Their boots threw grotesque shadows on the wall before them.

Redl turned to face them, his shoulders squared, his arms folded. The cords of his neck were drawn taut. This was the moment he had been awaiting for eight hours. "Good evening, gentlemen, I have been expecting you."

One of the officers stepped forward. His mouth and chin were merged in the shadows. But his eyes were unnaturally luminous. "Herr Redl, we want a statement of your activities."

For a second the officer seemed to be addressing only the mute, flickering shadows of his own figure screened against the wall. Then the man before him slowly came to life. "Yes . . . in the basement of my country home at Prague you will

find documents that will make the entire story . . . clear to you."

There was a silence deeper than when one has merely ceased to speak. And then: "Alfred," blurted out one of the officers, "why did you do it?" The outbreak was weird, unnatural, unforgivable.

Not a muscle of Redl's face moved. "Gentlemen, I suggest we proceed with the business."

A second officer stepped forward, placed a shiny Mauser revolver on the writing desk. Redl glanced at it. Behind him was an open window. A sudden gust of breeze blew in and caressed the back of his neck. He picked up the revolver, examined it almost tenderly. "Yes," he murmured, "this is the most honorable way."

The officers bowed stiffly. *"Auf Wiedersehen,"* he said.

The officers left without a reply. As they passed through the lobby of the hotel one of them spoke in an undertone to a detective, who immediately took up his station outside of room Number One. The officers turned down the Herrengasse and entered the Café Central. Here they took a table and ordered coffee. The hours passed. Not a word was spoken. They sipped their coffee and puffed on cigarettes.

Meanwhile the man in the hotel room sat down at his desk and wrote several letters: one to his superior officer in Prague, a brigadier general who years before had selected him as his protégé and ever since had boosted him along the critical stages of his career. He wrote farewells to certain of his old classmates at the military academy who had stood beside him and received the insignia of second lieutenant on that happy day of graduation when life held so much promise. Next he wrote a letter to a woman who had loved him and whose passion he could not return. For, to tell the truth, Alfred Redl was incapable of loving any woman physically, and in despair he had turned to drugs. And now he took up his pen, almost mechanically, and scrawled across a sheet of note paper his final words in this world: "Pray for me."

His fingers tightened. He gulped down a stiff drink of whisky and removed the lamp shade so that the bulb threw a blinding splash of light across him. Yes, he, Alfred Redl, must play this scene in the spotlight—as always.

He faced the mirror with the revolver in his hand and shot himself in the head.

Fifteen months later the war broke out. The world was astonished when Marshal Putnik and his Serbian Army hurled back three massive invasions by the Austro-Hungarians before being finally vanquished. German Intelligence, which for years had worked closely with the Kundschafte Stelle, was amazed to discover that it had been deceived as to the actual numerical strength of the Russians. The timetable of the Central Powers was ruined. Badly needed troops were not dispatched to the aid of the German drive in the west. The Allies held on the Marne and the course of the war was altered.

Millions watched the drama of events on the battlefield, but only ten people were aware that a young officer on the Austro-Hungarian General Staff was responsible for one of history's greatest betrayals.

THE MYSTERY OF THE NORTH POLE

ON DECEMBER 1, 1909, a message was flashed from a little wireless station in the Shetland Islands to all corners of the globe. "The North Pole has been reached!" This was followed by a second wire from the captain of the vessel *Hans Egede.* "We have on board the American traveler, Dr. Cook, who reached the North Pole, April 21, 1908." Few messages have ever stirred the imagination of millions as powerfully as this news that came like a bolt out of the blue. The North Pole, that fabled region which travelers had surrendered their lives and fortunes trying to attain for centuries, had at last been reached. The most valuable prize in the annals of adventure had been plucked —and not by an explorer whose name was known in every land, but by an obscure physician from Brooklyn.

When the *Hans Egede,* on which Cook had embarked, reached Denmark, the explorer received a tumultuous reception. A flotilla of small steamers, tugboats, sailboats escorted the *Hans Egede* into the harbor, as whistles screamed and bands played and crews sent up cheer upon cheer. A battery of movie cameras cranked out a film record of the hysterical scene.

As the Crown Prince stepped aboard the *Hans Egede,* the guest of honor stood sheepishly with a baggy cap in his hands. His blue dreamy eyes, half blinded by long months in the Arctic twilight, seemed unable to give credit to what they observed. But he had the powerful hands of a seaman. His complexion was burned by long exposure to the glare of the ice and snow. These characteristics stamped him as the authentic hero of the day. He was a man who had truly returned from another world.

The moment he stepped on solid ground the mob lost every remnant of restraint. A bouquet of roses which had been presented on deck was torn from his grasp. His hat was snatched. The cuffs of his shirt were ripped away. An English

journalist who stood immediately behind him quickly flung his hands around the explorer and pressed backward with all his weight against the crowd. Several other correspondents joined arms with the first and formed a human barrier. But for this improvised bodyguard, the man who had survived the perils of the Arctic might have been crushed to death.

Having safely navigated the doctor through the mob into the Royal Geographical Building across the street, these correspondents were joined by their colleagues from every leading newspaper in the Western world. The maws of the press were hungrily awaiting the story of the conquest of the Pole from Dr. Cook's own lips. The weather-beaten little physician, who if his mustache had been turned up at the corners would have looked like a twin of the German Kaiser, answered all questions with engaging frankness. Although he was weary beyond belief, he never once lost his patience. The story he told was substantially as follows:

Years ago he had succumbed to the lure of the Arctic. In 1891 he had left his practice in Brooklyn to enlist as a surgeon with Admiral Peary's expedition to Greenland. He had also enrolled in the celebrated *Belgica* expedition to the Antarctic. As years passed he had never ceased to hope that he would someday reach the North Pole. He lived his entire life with this obsession.

In the summer of 1907 he succeeded in interesting a millionaire sportsman, John R. Bradley, to back an expedition. A vessel was bought in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and ice-sheathed. It was fortified with oak above and below the water line, and outfitted with steel plates to strengthen the bow and stern. It was installed with heavy rigging and a seventy-five-horsepower gasoline engine. The project was kept entirely secret. The *John R. Bradley* sailed from Gloucester in July 1907, without the slightest fanfare. So carefully had Cook's plans been concealed that even the captain and the crew had no intimation of the truth. As the journey progressed, however, the captain became suspicious.

"You have enough food to feed an army of Eskimos," he remarked. "Judging by the way this ship is outfitted, if you hadn't told me you were going on a fishing trip, I could swear you were out to reach the Pole."

At the end of August the ship reached the harbor of Etah at

the upper extremity of Baffin Bay. Beyond this harbor lay a world of ice. Now, at last, the captain was told the truth. He was informed that Cook would be put ashore at a spot the Eskimos called Annooktok and that he would gather a party of natives and continue entirely on his own. "I'm tickled to hear that you and I are returning to the States," the captain told Bradley. "I wouldn't stay around for a million dollars!"

At Annooktok, 80 degrees latitude, Cook found a tribe of Eskimos enjoying the fruits of an extremely successful hunting season. Bear meat was plentiful. The dogs were well fed. The explorer decided to establish his base here and that very winter undertake the hazardous journey northward. He was put ashore with supplies to last him three years. These included forty tons of coal; light, portable, aluminum stoves fueled with kerosene; a hundred and twenty thousand cans of food; quantities of hickory wood for sled building; ten thousand boxes of matches; a hundred and fifty gallons of alcohol; barrels of rice and flour; guns, knives, beads, and trinkets of all sorts for trade with the natives.

In planning the trip Cook completely defied convention. All previous expeditions had been undertaken during the summer months when the weather was comparatively mild. However, Cook decided to risk a trip in the dead of winter, reasoning that the ice was more firmly packed and offered a smoother surface during this season. Furthermore, there was less danger of the party's being slowed down by open lanes of water and drifting ice packs. He determined upon a westerly route by way of Ellesmere Island and Nansen Strait, for the purpose of traveling through game country up to the 82nd degree. For five months Cook made preparations from the headquarters of a workshop erected out of packing boxes. He selected and trained his Eskimos, built sleds, fashioned harnesses, and sent out regular scouting parties to observe the condition of the ice ahead. And in the middle of February he was ready.

At the first gleam of dawn following the long Arctic night, he set out with eleven hand-picked Eskimos and a hundred and three dogs over the ice of Smith Sound for the rugged, mountainous Ellesmere Island. The party pushed with their sledges through temperatures that ran as low as 83 degrees Fahrenheit below zero! However, even at this temperature the country was well supplied with bears, musk oxen, and caribou.

Cook was able to keep his dogs and men amply fed and in good condition for the severe struggle ahead. At the end of a month the explorer reached the frozen surface of Nansen Sound, and finally the northern point of Axel Heiberg Island. Before them stretched the Polar Sea—four hundred and sixty miles of water frozen to ice, in the center of which was the North Pole.

Since no life existed on this bleak, grim Paleocrystic Sea, it would be necessary to make a quick dash to the Pole with a few men, carrying as little weight as possible, and to return immediately to outlast the provisions taken along. Cook was well aware of the odds. Hitherto no human being had survived this trip to the Pole and back. The suddenly opening rifts of ice, the lethal ice floes, the unendurable cold, the lack of food had accounted for countless lives.

For this dash Cook retained with him only two Eskimos and twenty-six dogs, sending the rest of the party south. And then he departed on the adventure. Behind him lay the last bit of land on the continent. Around and before him, as far as the eye could see, stretched moving ice; its surface was rough and dotted with little hills. From the tallest of these hummocks he could observe no change in his surroundings. There was no sign of any living thing, bird or beast or fowl.

The temperature made any great exertion impossible. It took the three weary, frozen men nine days to cover the first hundred miles of "the Unknown." The water froze over cracks as soon as they opened. One by one the sledge-pulling dogs dropped in their tracks frozen to death. Their carcasses were eaten by the survivors. Soon the men no longer had the energy to erect snow blocks for their evening's shelter. They used their silk tent, braving the cold. They ate their frozen food, washing it down with tea. This tea, which was maintained in heat-conserving vessels, was one of the chief reasons for their keeping alive.

And then, on the twenty-first of April, Cook's sextant showed what had never before been indicated to a man—89 degrees, 59 minutes, 30 seconds! Just a few steps forward, and the Brooklyn physician reached a point of the earth where no latitude or longitude is registered and all directions point south. The North Pole had been attained!

Cook planted the Stars and Stripes on this axis of the globe; placed a smaller flag together with a written statement of the conquest in a metal cylinder near by.

However, after the first moment of exhilaration had passed and he stood numbed, half conscious, in a temperature of 38 degrees below zero, hundreds of miles from human habitation, a feeling of melancholy came over him. Later he wired the press his thoughts on this occasion.

"Though overjoyed with the success of the conquest . . . an intense feeling of loneliness came with the further scrutiny of the horizon. What a cheerless spot to have aroused the ambition of man for so many ages! An endless sea of purple snows. No life. No land. Nothing to relieve the monotony of frost. We were the only pulsating creatures in a dead world of ice."

Cook and his Eskimos remained two days at the Pole, taking observations and checking on the records of their findings. Then they started homeward. They pushed across the shifting masses of ice, trying desperately to reach Heiberg Island, where provisions had been stored for them. It was a race for survival. As they struggled through the fog, sudden rifts in the ice opened up huge lanes of open water practically at their feet. Had it not been for a collapsible canvas boat which Cook had insisted on taking at the sacrifice of food reserves, the party would surely have perished. For this boat, time and again, provided the only means of transportation from one mass of floating ice to the next.

After twenty days' travel their food was practically gone. For three days they continued without a morsel to eat. But they managed at the eleventh hour to reach a latitude where animal life existed. Death from starvation was averted by the appearance of a walrus. Weak though he was, Cook moved forward on his stomach and shot it. Even now, however, as they approached civilization, their perils increased. At one point they were stopped by an ice pack in Wellington Channel which could not be traversed by boat or sledge. For two months they spent day and night in their canvas boat in the open water, while furious storms drenched them. Although the country abounded in game, their supply of bullets was so depleted they could afford to risk only an occasional shot. By the time the last bullet was used, Cook had developed great skill in lassoing musk oxen. In addition, he broke his sledges into bows and arrows, and as the party skirted the ice pack at last and proceeded up the coast of Ellesmere Island, it lived entirely upon the food obtained on the hunt. Eventually Cook arrived at a

point opposite Etah, and a dash across the water brought them among a colony of Eskimos. The epic journey was over. Since no ships arrived at Etah, Cook, after almost a year of rest, continued southward until he reached the Danish settlement of Upernivik. Here he boarded the *Hans Egede*. From a telegraph station at Lerwick in the Shetland Islands, he wired the news of his discovery and continued on to Denmark, where he received his tremendous reception.

This was the story the unassuming explorer related to the correspondents immediately after his arrival. And then, upon reaching his hotel, he adjusted himself to the luxuries of civilization. He washed himself thoroughly, changed into a new suit of clothes, and visited a dentist. Months of dining on walrus meat had ruined his front teeth.

His stay in Copenhagen was marked by every imaginable honor. He was received by the King. He was banqueted by the Royal Geographical Society. Students from the schools paraded in uniform before him. He received a doctor's degree from the University of Copenhagen and medals from the leading scientific societies. He was besieged by newspaper editors, publishers, and theater managers. The New York *Herald* cabled twenty-five thousand dollars for an exclusive narrative of his adventure. The French paper *Le Matin* bid fifty thousand dollars for translation rights. One New York manager guaranteed a quarter of a million dollars for a series of lecture tours. All in all, Cook's offers for articles, lectures, and other personal appearances totaled a million and a half dollars.

Before his departure from Copenhagen, Cook was the guest of honor at a banquet given to foreign correspondents. While he sat listening to an after-dinner speech a waiter tiptoed up to him and placed a cablegram under his plate. Other attendants just as quietly placed cablegrams under the plates of all the guests. By the time the speaker had finished with his address, the cables had been read. A strange silence settled over the hall, and then suddenly it was filled with excited whisperings.

The cablegram that had caused the sensation consisted of only seven words. It had been wired from Indian Harbor, Labrador, by the famed Arctic explorer Robert E. Peary. It read: "Stars and Stripes nailed to the Pole."

The incredible had occurred. For centuries the North Pole had remained unclaimed. Cook's achievement had made the

story of the ages. But now, while the plaudits were still ringing in his ears, a second American announced his attainment of the goal.

To the newsmen who crowded around him seeking his reaction to Peary's message, the explorer appeared perfectly affable. "That is good news," he declared. "I hope Peary did get to the Pole. His observations and reports on that region will confirm mine." And then he shrugged his shoulders. "There is glory enough for two."

But hardly had Cook returned to his round of honors when a second message was flashed from Labrador. To correspondents who had greeted him at Indian Harbor, Peary made an extraordinary announcement. He declared that in Greenland he had met the two Eskimos who had accompanied Cook on his trip. And these natives had sworn that they had not at any time during the expedition been out of sight of land. Since the North Pole was surrounded by a vast sea, it followed, claimed Peary, that Cook had defrauded the world; he had not come within hundreds of miles of the Pole!

Robert E. Peary was an old salt with steel-gray eyes and a terrible temper. The spell of the North had possessed him ever since 1888 when, at the age of thirty-two, he had chanced to pick up a book on Arctic travel. He gave up a promising career in the Engineer Corps of the Navy to devote himself to exploring the Arctic regions.

For the next twenty-three years he suffered unbelievable hardships during increasing efforts to find the Pole. His wife, who accompanied him on one of his expeditions, gave birth to a child at a point farther north than any other white baby had ever been born.

Peary refused to concede defeat. Once his feet were so badly frozen that eight of his toes had to be amputated. Yet he continued to drive his dog sledges over ice at altitudes of eight thousand feet and risked his life on runaway packs. His exploits were legendary. His forced marches excited wonder and admiration. On one occasion the ice upon which he had encamped suddenly separated from the main floe and carried him headlong across dangerous waters for five days. On another occasion he almost slipped over an ice shelf a yard wide into the gulf below. In 1906, during his fifth attempt, he actually reached a point 174

miles from his goal—the farthest point north ever attained. But with his pack of dogs decimated, he was forced to cut his flags from the pinnacles of ice and retreat to his base. Even the death of his chief financial backer did not deter him from making a final expedition. He was over fifty. His active life was behind him. It was now do or die.

And now the dauntless explorer proclaimed before the world that at ten o'clock on the morning of April 6, 1909, he at last had stood at the pole. He had shaken hands with each member of his party and planted five American flags. Then he had made the return trip to Cape Columbia.

On September the sixth, the *Roosevelt* dropped anchor in Battle Harbor, Labrador. As Peary appeared on deck with a happy smile of achievement, reporters swarmed around him.

"What do you think of the claims of the man who has challenged you?" they asked.

"What claims?"

"Why, haven't you heard? Dr. Cook from Brooklyn has just announced that he reached the Pole a year ago!"

Peary gripped the railing of the deck. His ruddy face grew pale. He knew Cook. The physician had been a surgeon on one of his early expeditions. He knew, furthermore, that Cook had established a base at Etah. But he had met Eskimos who assured him that the doctor had not traveled more than two days from his base! The longer he weighed the news, the more Peary was convinced that the physician's claim was preposterous. And now, after a lifetime of a struggle and sacrifice, instead of receiving the tributes of a grateful world, he, Peary, was confronted with a challenge to his very honor. The irascible old explorer was consumed with a terrible fury. He would not allow this prize to be stolen from his grasp. He pounded the railing with his fist.

"By God, I will battle for recognition!"

Peary's challenge of Cook raised the already feverish excitement of the public to the pitch of histeria. The whole world acted as though it were present at a sporting event, dividing into partisan cheering sections. Had Cook really reached the North Pole? Had Peary? Were either or both of them lying? Supporters of each indulged in a pitched battle of claims and counter claims.

Despite Peary's charge that he was a fraud, the likable Brook-

lyn physician remained the idol of a large segment of worshipers who refused to lose faith in him. Upon his arrival in New York on December 21, 1909, he received a welcome on the scale of his reception at Copenhagen. Crowds lined the wharves of the East River, waving madly as the *Grand Republic* steamed into Brooklyn. Notables shouted themselves hoarse through megaphones in a medley of speeches. As Cook drove in an open auto under an Arch of Welcome, thousands of school children waved American flags. He received the freedom of New York in a ceremony in City Hall. He had to fight his way through a mob of admirers in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria to get to his room. When Admiral Peary arrived on the *Roosevelt,* a crowd of Cook's supporters stood on the banks of the Hudson flinging boos and catcalls. The Peary yartisans were too overwhelmed to reply.

Peary's explosive remarks to the press had labeled him in the public eye as a poor sport. Cook, on the other hand, jauntily offered the hand of friendship to Peary. He made strenuous efforts to tone down the abuse of his supporters, and he modestly disavowed any claims to being the sole discoverer of the Pole. His tactics won numerous friends.

A sample poll taken by the Pittsburgh *Press* revealed that of seventy-six thousand people questioned, seventy-three thousand were convinced that Cook was the true discoverer of the North Pole. Less than three thousand supported Peary. When Peary challenged Cook to submit along with him the evidence supporting each claim to a common scientific tribunal, the Pittsburgh *Press* reported in a manner typical of the public temper: "Cook is first in the hearts of his countrymen. The American people can afford to remain indifferent to any decision arrived at by the scientists!"

During congressional hearings on a bill to recognize Peary's achievement and to retire him with the rank of rear admiral, a substantial group of congressmen blocked the legislation. The politicians denounced Peary as a "wilful and deliberate liar, dirty pilferer of words, and a contemptible ass!"

But as time passed a curious thing happened. The weight of scientific opinion, in contrast to the view of the man in the street, swung over to the side of Peary. Experts grew deeply skeptical of Cook. They realized that the only witnesses to his exploit were two Eskimos who had disappeared into the wilderness of

the North shortly after the alleged expedition. They refused to be convinced, among other things, that Cook could have carried on two dog sleds enough food for three men and the dogs for eighty-two days of travel. As a matter of fact, the faith in Cook of a number of thoughtful people had been shaken by a series of articles written by Philip Gibbs, one of the world's great correspondents and the first reporter to have interviewed Cook at Copenhagen. The events which led to the interview are a story in themselves.

One morning, before the arrival of the explorer, Gibbs had been called into the editorial offices of the London *Daily Chronicle* and told: "There's an American named Cook who claims he has discovered the North Pole. Go to Copenhagen and get the story."

The assignment was a difficult one. The bulk of correspondents was already assembled in the Danish capital. However, with the optimism indigenous to an ace reporter, Gibbs embarked for Denmark by way of the North Sea and arrived in the capital tired and dirty the evening before the official welcome. He went into a shabby-looking café for a cup of coffee, and here he met with a stroke of good fortune. As he sat smoking over his coffee wondering how he could get the jump on his rivals, a buzz of excitement filled the café. An attractive woman in white furs had entered with a tall, rugged escort. They took seats in the opposite corner. A waiter serving Gibbs whispered, "See that pretty young lady? Do you know who she is?"

"Why, no."

"She's the wife of Knud Rasmussen, the celebrated explorer. Rasmussen was the man who supplied Dr. Cook with the dogs for his expedition. They're close friends."

Gibbs sat upright. Here was the lead he had been looking for.

He rose and, making his way to Mrs. Rasmussen's table, introduced himself as a news reporter from London who had come all the way to interview Dr. Cook. Perhaps she could give him an exclusive story.

Mrs. Rasmussen smiled in a friendly fashion and answered him in a mixture of French, German, and English.

"Yes, my husband was the last man to see Dr. Cook before he set out for the Pole. And for this reason I would like to be the first to greet him on his return. The director of the Danish-Greenland Company had promised to take me down the Kattegat

in a tug tonight. But the fog has ruined everything. The boat will not land until tomorrow. And the tug will set out at a very early hour from Elsinore. I can't possibly be there in time. I'm very disappointed."

Gibbs was quick with a suggestion. "Look, Mrs. Rasmussen. I have an idea. Why not go to Elsinore immediately, put up at a hotel, and board the tug at dawn? I'd like to get aboard the *Hans Egede* along with you!"

Mrs. Rasmussen shook her head. "It's too late. The last train for Elsinore has already left."

"Let's get a taxi."

"But no driver is permitted to travel at night out of Copenhagen without special permission."

Gibbs wasn't going to give up on his idea that easily. He called over a waiter and asked him to summon a taxi driver. In a few minutes a driver was obtained. Gibbs offered to pay him the cost of the fine if he were stopped by the police.

The matter was arranged and the party set out for Elsinore. Gibbs had staked all on a gamble. He had no assurance that he would be permitted to board the launch, even if Mrs. Rasmussen were taken. The director was her friend, but he was a total stranger.

Upon arriving in Elsinore, they went immediately to a hotel. Mrs. Rasmussen caught sight of the director in the lobby. While Gibbs stood aside, she entered into conversation with him. Presently she returned to the correspondent. Her face registered disappointment.

"He won't take us," she announced.

"That's rotten luck."

"But he will take you!" she declared.

She went on to explain the reason for this extraordinary decision. The director had been besieged with requests from all the society ladies of Copenhagen, including his own wife, to be taken aboard his launch. He had turned down each application in order to play no favorites. However, he had no objection to accommodating the English journalist. And so Gibbs stepped into a tug at the crack of dawn while all the other European correspondents cooled their heels on shore.

Climbing up a rope ladder onto the deck of the *Hans Egede,* Gibbs found himself amid a company of men and women in furs and oilskins, missionaries and the wives of missionaries. He

singled out one Anglo-Saxon whom he guessed to be the explorer and introduced himself. Cook greeted him in a friendly manner and invited him to have breakfast with him.

Here was the journalistic scoop of a lifetime! At the conclusion of the meal Gibbs pressed Cook with questions concerning the trip. Being entirely unaquainted with Arctic matters, he asked first the most obvious question he could think of.

"Can I have a look at your diary? It would make excellent copy for me."

To the correspondent's amazement, the explorer looked at him with sudden suspicion bordering on hostility.

"I do not have my diary. I gave all my papers up north to a friend who is taking them on his yacht to New York."

"When will he arrive?"

"Next year."

Undeterred, Gibbs persisted: "May I at least see your astronomical observations?"

The explorer answered with obvious irritation, "I have already told you that I have brought along no papers." He paused and added in a much more gentle tone, "You have believed other explorers who have had only their stories to tell. You have accepted every word from their lips. Why do you doubt me?"

Instantly suspicion leaped into the mind of the correspondent. But, concealing his feelings, he desisted from this line of questioning. Instead he encouraged Cook to talk about his personal adventures. As Gibbs took notes on the narrative, the suspicion continued to grow within him that something was very rotten in Denmark.

"By intuition rather than by evidence," he wrote afterward in an article, "by some quick instinct of facial expression, by some sensibility to mental and moral dishonesty, I was convinced absolutely by the end of an hour that this man had not been to the North Pole, but was attempting to bluff the world."

As the *Hans Egede* made for port, Gibbs took careful note of the explorer's reaction to the ovation.

"Dr. Cook came out of his cabin with a livid look, almost green. I never saw guilt and fear more clearly written on any human face. He could hardly pull himself together when the Crown Prince . . . boarded the ship and offered the homage of Denmark to his glorious achievement." And then Gibbs added, "But that was the only time in which I saw Cook lose his nerve

. . . His manner at all times, after that temporary breakdown on the *Hans Egede,* was convincing."

Upon landing, Gibbs avoided all other reporters. He jumped into a taxicab and drove to a small hotel in the outskirts of the city. "I knew that I had the story of the world." In this hotel he wrote a seven-column dispatch to the *Daily Chronicle* in which he reported his meeting with Cook and aired his conviction that the man was a fraud. "When I had handed the story into the telegraph office I knew that I had burned my boats, and that my whole journalistic career would be made or marred by this message."

While Gibbs wrote his exposé, Cook was interviewed by an assemblage of reporters. He was self-composed and completely convincing. He referred to the fact that he had sent his records on to the United States. He promised that he would make them public as soon as practicable. At the end of the interview the dean of European correspondents, Mr. Wickam Stead, stood up and on behalf of the entire press paid homage to the explorer's exploit.

"Spellbound by Stead's enthusiasm," wrote Gibbs, "and not having had the advantage of my experience on the *Hans Egede,* there was not a single man . . . who suggested a word of doubt about the achievement claimed by Cook."

Gibbs, was the lone voice of dissent. When he followed his first dispatch with a series of stories hammering home his attack, Copenhagen was shocked. The Danes vented their fury upon the man who had "defiled the hero." Gibbs became the object of hostile demonstrations in the restaurants and cafés. The newspaper *Politiken* labeled him the "liar Gibbs." For a time it was literally dangerous for him to appear in the streets. And on top of all this his colleagues of the press, those usually dispassionate journeymen, turned against him. The climax was reached when Wickham Stead thundered into his hotel and laid a hand angrily on his shoulder.

"Young man," he boomed, "you have not only ruined yourself, which does not matter very much, but you have also ruined the *Daily Chronicle,* for which I have had a great esteem."

Even after Cook's departure from Copenhagen, Gibbs remained a parash among journalists. But he stuck to his guns. And suddenly a series of events entirely vindicated him in the eyes of the world.

The story of Dr. Cook's downfall can be summarized briefly. During the first few months after his return, while he lectured all over America for fees ranging from one to ten thousand dollars an appearance, Peary and his clique continually prodded him to produce the scientific proofs of his claim. At last he complied. He designated a committee of scientists from the University of Copenhagen to be the court of judgment. But shortly after he dispatched his records to Copenhagen, and before the committee announced its decision, two men came forward and made an affidavit. These individuals, one of whom was a sea captain, swore that they had been paid by Dr. Cook to work out a series of astronomical observations such as might have been recorded by an explorer at the North Pole. Furthermore, they charged that Cook had sent these fake observations to the committee at Copenhagen.

To say that this announcement caused a sensation would be putting it mildly. But hardly had the public recovered from the shock when it was jolted by another bombshell. The committee itself released a statement that the records submitted by Cook contained not the slightest proof that he had ever reached the North Pole. Knud Rasmussen, the Danish explorer and Cook's old friend, upon being summoned by the committee during its deliberations, was reported to have said: "When I saw the so-called evidence, I realized that it was a scandal. The documents which Dr. Cook sent to the university are most impudent. It is a most childish attempt at cheating."

But when this announcement from Copenhagen was flashed to America, Cook was no longer present to receive it. His nerve had finally deserted him in the face of an outraged public. He had fled the country. The incident that led to his flight occurred on a lecture platform in Missoula, Montana. In addition to claiming the discovery of the Pole, Cook had boasted of a series of other accomplishments. Among these was the allegation that he had been the first man to conquer Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America. In fact, he had written a book about the climb. One evening, while lecturing in Missoula, he was suddenly confronted by Edward Barrill, the man who had served as Cook's guide during the ascent. Barrill declared that Cook had never reached the top; that he had defrauded the public into honoring him on the basis of a lying claim. The

audience was thrown into an uproar. Cook hastily left the platform—and the country.

For more than a year America heard nothing more of her harassed explorer. He traveled incognito to South America. Then he crossed the ocean to England, where he met his wife and children.

But his exile was unendurable. He felt strongly that he must answer his attackers; explain his conduct to the millions of people who had once put their faith in him. And so he contacted the editors of *Hampton's Magazine* and wrote for them an apology filled with pathos and courage. He freely admitted his mistakes in judgment and conduct. An explorer, he declared, whose body is half starved and worn with suffering and whose mind is numb with the Arctic cold, can never be sure of the accuracy of his calculations. What man, after all, can say with certainty that he had absolutely reached the mathematical pinpoint of the world? "Did I get to the North Pole? Perhaps I made a mistake in thinking that I did; perhaps I did not make a mistake. After mature thought, I confess that I do not know absolutely whether I reached the Pole or not."

But whether he reached the Pole or not, Cook certainly scored one triumph. He wrote so vividly about the Pole that people to this day who withhold from him the palm of adventure willingly award him the wreath for literature. Professor William Lyon Phelps, in an article entitled "People I Wish I'd Met," paid him the ultimate compliment. "I wish I'd met . . . Dr. Cook who wrote so admirably in 1909 about his discovery of the North Pole, even if he didn't discover it . . . It is a greater gift to be able to write well about something you have not seen than to write dully about something you have."

Once Cook was revealed as a hoaxster, at least to the satisfaction of the millions, the honors and praise for the conquest of the Pole went at last to Robert E. Peary.

Two years to the day Peary claimed he reached the Pole, his exploit was officially recognized by the President and the Congress of the United States. He settled down to a quiet, happy life. In the summer of 1917, while delivering lectures on the war, he was stricken with anemia, and in February 1920 he passed away.

Long after the North Pole controversy, Cook's talent for the picturesque brought him to the attention of the public once

again. In 1923 he got into serious difficulty with the law. Hired as a publicist for certain Texas oil companies, he prepared colorful reports persuading investors to pour money into a series of mergers. He was arrested for using the mails with intent to defraud, was convicted by a jury and sentenced to fourteen years in the penitentiary. Judge Killits, who delivered the sentence, addressed the defendant with extreme severity. "You have come to the point where your peculiar personality fails you," he declared. "This deal of yours is so damnably rotten that you ought to be paraded as a practical warning in every state where you have sold stock."

Cook was pardoned by President Roosevelt and released from prison in 1933.

In old age Cook remained an affable, charming fellow. He never lacked a friend. Public controversy over him had long since subsided. His adversary, Peary, had gone to his reward. In his declining years Cook once more put forward his old claims, stoutly insisting that he had actually reached the Pole. The fact remains that despite Cook's own word—and some people are inclined to believe he was honestly deceived—the majority of scientists, the only experts qualified to judge, have rejected his claim.

But in the last few years, just when it seemed to have been laid to rest, the entire controversy has been resurrected again. Not only has Cook been discredited by most scientists, but in the last few years certain influential authorities, after a mature weighing of the evidence submitted by Robert E. Peary, have come forward with the startling opinion *that Peary himself did not actually reach the Pole!* These scientists, utilizing modern techniques of appraisal, base their assertion upon certain circumstances surrounding Peary's expedition which make it probable, in their eyes, that the doughty admiral was completely deluded as to his accomplishment! Other authorities stoutly oppose this view. The question as to whether any mortal has actually set foot upon the axis of the globe has suddenly become a red-hot issue today. In 1926 two men, it is true, passed over the North Pole—but not on foot. These were Richard Byrd and Floyd Bennett, who looked out upon the celebrated region from the cockpit of an airplane thousands of feet above the terrain, during a non-stop flight from Spitzbergen.

As for Cook and Peary—how close did they come to the

Pole? Were they, as well as the American people, the victims of an amazing hoax—a hoax perpetrated by the elusive, deceptive Arctic itself, which sent both explorers through life in the firm belief that they had secured the prize of the ages when all they had grasped was a mirage?

THE MAN WHO "INVENTED" MONEY

BOSTON in 1920 was no longer the exclusive front lawn of Beacon Hill society. Thousands of immigrants from Europe had crowded into tenements on the fringes of aristocratic Louisbourg Square, opened fruit stands within the shadow of the Old North Church, cobbled shoes, and carried bricks, mixed cement and fixed watches, where hitherto only shipbuilders and witch-hunters had carried on their trade. Along the Common the pale, proper faces of Beacon Hill debutantes were mingled with the exciting complexions of dark-haired women from the Mediterranean countries and soft-eyed belles from County Cork. Austere Symphony Hall vibrated with music played by passionate Russians and Poles. The Titians that hung in the Boston Art Museum were devoured by eyes of the immigrants who had ripened under the same Italian sun.

Boston in 1920 was a lady with a sanctimonious past who, at middle age, was ready at last for a flirtation with the devil.

The devil appeared in the person of a young Italian stockbroker's clerk. He took the lady for a dizzy fling and cleaned her out of fifteen million dollars.

Charles Ponzi was born in Parma, Italy, the home of grated cheese known the world over. At the age of seventeen he boarded a ship for America with two hundred dollars in his pocket. By the time he landed at the Battery he had two dollars and fifty cents in change. The rest he had lost at the card table. He was a thin-faced young fellow, only five feet two, with piping-hot eyes. He would have made a fleet halfback on a football team. But no matter what signals were called, he would carry the ball on every play.

Only a mite physically, he didn't mind bucking the line. Like many of his countrymen, he first took a job pushing a wheelbarrow for a builder. Then, growing restless, he turned up in

Pittsburgh and went to work as a grocery boy. After a bit he quit and rode the rails, getting to know all kinds of people over a cigarette in the rain-dampened cabooses. Then he settled down as a dishwasher in restaurants and hotels off Broadway, and he finally rose to be a waiter.

It was at this period that he got his first tuxedo. He liked the feel of it. He made up his mind that he would always wear a tuxedo—and not as a waiter, but as the man who pays the tips. He liked the lines of a limousine and the women who came along for the ride; he liked the idea of a daily massage, the handshake of mayors, a smart piece of carbon from Tiffany's the friendship of people who got sunburned only at the Lido. He wanted to watch a fast-running pony from his stables win at Pimlico.

That was his dream. And he would achieve it. He would achieve it by being smarter than all his countrymen, who lived out their lives mixing cement and shoveling dirt.

Money set the direction of his life. He went to Montreal and became a clerk at the Zrossi bank. He handled bundles of cash —cash that was not his own. But that didn't matter. He dreamed that it was his. And soon the dividing line between dreams and reality was obliterated. He signed other people's names to checks and began using their assets as his own. The world was his at the stroke of a pen. He was detected, arrested, and sent to prison for three years, from 1908 to 1911. He went in with nothing but his dream and came out with it—big, beautiful, undiminished.

In the winter of 1917 he turned up in Boston, Massachusetts. He became a fruit peddler and failed in the business. He married a handsome Italian girl, Rose Guecco. Somehow he avoided the war draft. He took a job as stock boy with J. P. Poole, import and export brokers.

Do you believe in bright, beautiful dreams? Within thirty-six months Charles Ponzi bought out, lock, stock, and barrel, the brokerage firm in which he had worked as a stock boy for sixteen dollars a week; and, in addition, he amassed fifteen million dollars!

During the years that he was employed by J. P. Poole, Ponzi never got within hailing distance of the president's office. He was on intimate terms only with the elevator boys. Yet the job ignited sparks in his brain. By the summer of 1919 he had been

promoted to a clerk handling office work. He dealt with correspondence and imagined that he was signing his name to million-dollar deals. He decided that he had wasted his career forging minor checks when the whole universe of international finance was his for the plucking.

The incident that launched Ponzi on his incredible get-rich-quick career was small enough. He had entered into a business correspondence with a Spaniard who had enclosed in one of his letters a postal reply coupon to pay for the remittance of a certain article he desired by return mail. As a hod carrier, dishwasher, and even as a bank forger, the simple young Italian had never before come across a postal reply coupon. And now, in exchanging it for stamps, Ponzi made a fascinating discovery. The Spaniard had bought the coupon in Madrid for one cent in American money. However, in the United States the coupon was redeemable for a nickel. The reason for this discrepancy, Ponzi learned, was due to the fact that postal reply coupons were exchanged at a rate fixed by treaty—a rate which, strangely enough, did not reflect the actual rate of exchange prevailing between America and most foreign countries. As a result of the war, the currencies of practically all these countries had depreciated tremendously. Why couldn't a smart fellow, reasoned Ponzi, exploit this apparent loophole in postal regulations? Since the dollar was at a premium abroad, one could buy gobs of cheap foreign currency, convert it into international postal reply coupons at par, and then reconvert the coupons back into sound American money at a profit! True, no one had successfully worked the scheme before him. But that fact didn't sober Ponzi. No one had thought of gravitation before Newton.

Here was a chance to make millions just by sending good old American currency to Europe and back again. With shining eyes, Ponzi took a pencil and made some rapid calculations. Suppose, for instance, he mailed a six-cent reply coupon, bought in Madrid, to Austria to be turned into kronen, whose rate of exchange was almost 97 per cent below par. He could then buy postal reply coupons at par, exchange them into relatively sound Swiss francs, and with these purchase a draft on New York. The profit would average 200 per cent and more!

This was too good an idea to keep to himself. Magnanimously, he quietly let a few friends in on the scheme. He explained that he would invest small sums for them in postal coupons and

guarantee a 50 per cent return in ninety days. And presto—he returned every one of these investments with the promised 50 per cent profit not in ninety days but in forty-five! His friends were lost in admiration. But these were small pickings. Uncle Sam's treasury was good for more than a hand-to-mouth business proposition. Here was a project millions were entitled to get into!

So the dapper little gambler quit his job at Poole's and rented a one-room office at 27 School Street, within a stone's throw of hallowed ground where the patriots of the Revolution lay buried. Too bad Sam Adams had been born too early to get in on Charles Ponzi's gravy train.

On the first day of business, December 20, 1919, Ponzi collected two hundred and fifty dollars. Three weeks later he turned over to his charter clients three hundred and seventy-five dollars.

News of this Maestro of Mazuma spread quickly. Ponzi's friends passed the word to their acquaintances of the golden new opportunity to outwit the Postal Department.

"Fifty per cent profit on your money in forty-five days—double it in six months."

Agents commenced to work for Ponzi, whispering the glad tidings to workers in offices and factories. The stream of people swelled into a torrent. Clerks, stenographers, immigrants who dreamed of amassing enough money for a villa in Italy, small businessmen, peanut peddlers, organ-grinders, pushcart operators, kept ladies, burlesque girls at the Old Howard, colored folk from Columbus Avenue, all hurried up one of the narrowest streets in Boston, through an entrance marked by a sign and an arrow: "To Charles Ponzi, Head of the Securities Exchange Company." They were ushered into a room conspicuous for its simplicity. Absent were the broadloom rugs, cashmere upholstery, and all the other furnishings of the big-time financial operator. No, this man Ponzi worked his miracles in the humble surroundings of an anchorite. A pine partition separated him from his public. At the teller's desk a young man paid out greenbacks, while close by a comrade watched every movement alertly, a revolver by his elbow. Free coffee and frankfurters were served to the people as they waited in a line that extended along Washington Street to hand in their money.

Yes, the dream had come true. By the spring of 1920, Ponzi was collecting two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a day!

His chief assistant, John S. Dondero, an ex-butcher's helper, was earning seven thousand dollars a week! The money came in so fast that it spilled over the dingy desk and drawers into a dozen wastepaper baskets, and it reached the ceilings of closets. "The very floor was carpeted with greenbacks." Sixteen clerks were hired merely to keep an eye on them. Branch offices were opened in New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, and Rhode Island, to take care of the flow of money in these states. Questioned as to the secret of his success, Ponzi declared:

"The trouble with bankers and businessmen is that they have been doing plenty for themselves but little for anybody else. I am rich, but I help others get rich."

The millennium had arrived. There was no longer any need to work for a living. So great was the hysteria to get rich quick that people sold their Liberty bonds and borrowed from loan sharks to invest cash with Ponzi. Even the very wealthy were lured by the bonanza. Speculators made fortunes by circulating amid crowds outside Ponzi's office and snatching up notes from the fainthearted. People blessed Ponzi for his free cup of coffee while they waited to invest anything from twenty-five dollars to fifty thousand. One of the faithful sank eighty-five thousand dollars into the Securities Exchange Company.

Bankers looked on with consternation as their savings accounts diminished. One bank, to salvage some of its money, had the temerity to advertise in the pages of the Boston *Post* a new, alluring interest of 5½ per cent. Piffle! What was 5½ per cent compared to "50 per cent on forty-five days—double your money in six months!" Yes, Charles Ponzi had revolutionized the concepts of banking and had exposed old, conservative financiers for the misers they were.

"The old guard can understand," Ponzi declared, "how I make a 100 per cent for myself; but what they are skeptical about is that I can make an additional 100 per cent for the public. Actually, the investor is a sucker under the old system."

When some die-hards doubted whether Ponzi was actually amassing profits on postal reply coupons, he squelched them as if they were mosquitoes. He explained that he had agents in countries all over Europe making the necessary currency conversions.

"I buy hundreds of thousands, even millions of postal coupons," he announced to the press. "My scheme can be tried

by anyone, except for one little thing. How I exchange these coupons for cash in America is my secret." He defied anyone, including the government, to wrest this secret from him.

These were palmy days. In a little less than eight months this thirty-eight-year-old ex-dishwasher had collected ten million dollars, and his name had become a byword from coast to coast. He acquired large holdings of Boston real estate. He purchased the controlling stock of the Hanover Trust Company. He bought out the J. P. Poole brokerage firm which had employed him as a stock boy. He had become one of Boston's financial giants, wined and dined by men who were leading figures in politics and finance when he had ridden the rails.

He bought an estate in Lexington, Massachusetts, that was a show place of the area. He spent a half million dollars on furnishings, stocked his cellar with a hundred gallons of rare wines. Here he lived with his mother and his young wife. Mrs. Charles Ponzi, whose father had peddled fruit, was given a thousand dollars a month for "pin" money. The basement of Ponzi's home was lined with vaults containing millions of dollars. Here special guards were on duty just as in a savings bank. Guards also patrolled the luxurious grounds with orders to shoot any prowler on sight. The little master was forever vigilant, even when he seemed most relaxed. Even while lounging in his dressing gown he carried a loaded automatic in his pocket. This was the price one paid for pushing into the big time.

Ponzi drove around town in a custom-built blue limousine. And whenever he alighted from it in his jaunty sports suit, with a cane on his arm and a carnation in his buttonhole, he was cheered to the skies just as though he were a movie idol. When he walked along Tremont Street on his way to work, swarms of of Irish, Italians, and Jews mobbed the dapper little man, screaming, "Take my money!" One Polish worker with four thousand dollars in his wallet said to another as he waited to be relieved of his life's savings:

"He's a fine man! What's all this talk about his trying to cheat us? He'd never dare to double-cross the poor. He knows we'd cut his heart out with a knife."

His own countrymen called him "the greatest Italian of them all." But Ponzi was a modest little fellow. Before the crowds

who gathered around him on the street corner, he shrugged off such an estimate with a twirl of his cane.

"What about Columbus who discovered America?" he shouted. "And Marconi who invented the wireless?"

And a voice shrieked out from the swarm of humanity:

"But you invented money!"

There were some cool heads in Boston, however, even during that fabulous summer of 1920. One of these belonged to Richard Grozier, son of the editor and publisher of the Boston *Post*. His father was away on vacation, and he had complete control of the newspaper. He decided to investigate Ponzi. It required courage to attack one of the most influential figures in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. But Grozier was willing to stake the future of his paper on his conviction that Ponzi was a racketeer. He called in his reporters.

"Go the limit and get the goods on him!"

At first the newsmen ran up against a stone wall whichever way they turned. Ponzi was willing to talk; in fact, he talked too readily. He showed the reporters two suitcases filled with a quarter of a million dollars in cash and another quarter of a million in Liberty bonds.

"This is the first installment of money I've earmarked for use against any attacks on me by your newspaper."

When the *Post* published an interview in which Charles W. Barron, a well-known financial expert, ridiculed Ponzi's pretensions that he was paying his depositors out of profits from postal reply coupons, Ponzi replied by filing suit against Barron for five million dollars and having his property attached.

"I've forgotten more about international finance," Ponzi told the press, "than Barron ever knew."

The jaunty little man oozed confidence.

"Look, Ponzi," a friend said half jokingly, "watch your step. Whatever you do, don't try to sell any of your notes to a policeman."

"I believe most of them have some," answered Ponzi with a laugh.

He wasn't wrong. Several inspectors in the police department had actually invested their cash in the Securities Exchange Company. And a group of policemen were enrolled as Ponzi's agents to hustle for business at a commission!

But there were clouds on the horizon. The Boston *Post*

wasn't the only agency attacking Ponzi. The federal postal authorities had launched an intensive undercover inquiry. These officials, from the first, were convinced that Ponzi had lied about the source of his profits. His profits could have been accounted for only if the issuance of postal reply coupons were limitless. The actual issuance of coupons, however, was not large enough to make his earnings possible. No man could have accumulated nine million dollars in a matter of months through the manipulation of six-cent stamps. A survey revealed that over the past six years the entire issue and redemption of coupons accounted for less than a million dollars!

The Boston *Post,* in the meantime, quietly confirmed the suspicions of the Postal Department. Grozier's correspondents in Paris and at the headquarters of the Postal League at Geneva discovered that there had not been any extensive business in coupons over the past few years.

But the little man with the carnation didn't bat an eyelash when confronted by the *Post* with this evidence. He readily admitted that he hadn't actually been making his profits from postal coupons after all.

"To tell the truth," he confessed blandly, "I've just used this idea as a blind for the Wall Street boys. I didn't want them to get even a hint of what my real scheme is. And, boys, I'm still going to keep it a secret. So long as my depositors get back their investments with profit, I don't have to account to anybody!"

Confronted with rapidly growing rumors that he was a swindler, Ponzi now publicly offered to refund money to any depositor who had cold feet.

"I have five million dollars on the table, and I can meet any run on me at any time," he boasted. "Yes, brothers, I may run out of blank checks, but I'll never run out of cash."

Some of his brethen who had invested their life's savings were not so sure of this. To take care of the run, Ponzi rented a second office in a former barroom over Pie Alley. For several successive days he calmly handed out cash, meeting the run to the tune of half a million dollars a day!

When the mob of people saw fellow investors walk into the School Street office with empty hands and come out, smiling, with twice as much money as they had deposited, faces turned red with shame. The run dwindled to a trickle. The crowd dis-

persed, filled with remorse that it had ever doubted Ponzi. Those die-hard pessimists who still insisted upon walking up to the cashier's office for their money were jeered at and publicly insulted as the "faithless ones" by hordes of the faithful. The *Post* was excoriated. Cash poured in at a greater rate than ever. Human nature is a wonderful thing. After the *Post's* exposure of Ponzi, he managed to collect more than five million dollars of investments!

But things seem never so bright to a man as when ruin is around the corner. The authorities were now convinced that Ponzi was running the biggest racket of the generation; that his talk of investment in postal coupons was a "song and dance" to hoodwink his investors; that actually he was using the oldest trick in the art of swindling. He was paying out his earliest investors with the funds taken in from the recent ones. In other words, he was robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Detectives prepared to move in on him. The Boston *Post* sent a reporter to Montreal. On August 11, 1920, Eugene Laflamme, the Bertillon expert of the Montreal Police Department, with the help of photographs supplied by the Boston *Post,* identified the Boston Ponzi as the clerk from the Zrossi bank who had served a three-year sentence for forgery in the prison of St. Vincent de Paul. That clinched matters. Two days later the blow fell. United States federal agents seized Ponzi's holdings and placed him under arrest.

Ponzi was charged with grand larceny and using the mails with intent to defraud. On the day of his arrest a mob of his victims stormed the School Street office in hysteria, shrieking, "Kill him!" Thousands of illiterate foreigners rushed into the offices of the State Capitol under the illusion that the governor would refund their money! Such is the stuff that fantasies are made of.

A check revealed that the little man from Parma, during less than a year of business, had tricked over forty thousand investors into handing over more than fifteen million dollars. On the very day his business was closed, he had taken in two million. No one could estimate with any degree of accuracy what his liabilities were, for he kept no books. However, it was certain that a very few of the investors would be lucky to receive twenty-five cents on the dollar.

Although Ponzi had come to the United States seventeen years previously, he had never bothered to take out American citizenship papers. Had he fled from this country, therefore, before his arrest, he might never have been extradited. As it is, he was indicted on eighty-six counts by the federal government even before the State had its day in court. Three weeks before Christmas he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in jail. He stood erect as he heard the sentence and then penciled a memorandum which he handed to the press.

"*Sic transit gloria mundi* [So passes away the glory of the world]."

Rose Ponzi declared in tears:

"I only wish that he was without a penny that I could better show him I deeply and truly love him!"

The dream was at an end—but the dreamer lived on. No sooner was he confined to jail in Plymouth, Massachusetts, than he blew new bubbles. He was the hero of an autobiographical fairy tale. Yes, the food was bad. It gave him stomach ulcers. But what did that matter? He penned lyric poetry to his wife. He dreamed of the books he would write in his seclusion. He was star of the prison's annual Christmas show, singing lyrics of his own composing that "wowed" the audience. And he sent out Christmas greetings on the finest engraved stationery to his thousands of creditors, people who were still liverish around the gills from his fleecing. Signing himself "Charles Ponzi, Plymouth, Mass.," he expressed the wish that the "recent miscarriage of your investment would not mar the spirit of the Christmas season." He asked them to look forward to the day when, stepping from prison a free man, he would help them to recover their losses. He pleaded with them, in closing, to send a word of encouragement to his wife and mother "in their great misfortune."

This may seem the height of impudence. But the *Homo sapiens* has a limitless capacity for suffering. Even now, in his cell, Ponzi received letters from admirers enclosing money which they begged him to invest for them!

He served three and a half of his five years for fraud and was released by the federal government for good behavior. But the moment he was free, the state authorities pounced on him. Massachusetts was not going to permit him to get off so easily.

He was indicted for grand larceny and brought to trial. A wrangling over technicalities in court consumed months. Finally, after three trials, he was convicted as a "common thief" and sentenced to seven years. He was released on ten thousand dollars' bail pending appeal.

The dream hadn't dimmed. Determined to restore his fortune, he departed for Florida, the mecca of the get-rich-quick cult. He arrived in Jacksonville under the alias of Charles Borelli, but the police were on the alert. They kept him under surveillance. A group of leading citizens, learning who he was, came to him with the intention of expelling him. He turned a sorrowful countenance on them. "Look, boys, society owes me a chance to redeem my past!" He declared that he would be quite content with a fifty-dollar-a-week job. No one offered him one.

Already his brain was busy with fertile new possibilities. He invested in underwater real estate, asking the public to come in for a profit of 250 per cent! But G-men on his trail pounced upon him before his scheme ripened into another swindle. Again he was indicted for using the mails with intent to defraud. Then the state of Florida chimed in and arrested him for violating the Blue Sky security laws. He was convicted and sentenced to a year, but he fled over the border. In the meantime his appeal in Massachusetts had been rejected. Two states were on his trail. He spent an entire winter traveling incognito through New England, stopping off at various winter resorts. Then the pace began to tell. He lost his nerve and surrendered himself to the district attorney in Massachusetts. In February 1927 he entered Charlestown State Prison to begin his sentence.

In February 1934, one day short of his full seven years' term, he left prison, pale, gray, but almost fifty pounds heavier. He was greeted at the gate by his wife, Rose. They arrived at South Station, where the police held against the ropes a furious crowd of his creditors, who even now shrieked hysterically for the money they had lost fourteen years before. The couple had dinner in a restaurant, took in a movie, and retired to a hotel.

The following morning two United States marshals entered the room.

"We have a warrant for your arrest."

"But what have I done now? I have served my sentence!"

And then he was told. He was to be held for deportation proceedings.

The little Italian sat down in a chair with his face in his hands. He wept like a child. All his reserves were shattered. Gone was the man who had driven around in a blue limousine and made fifteen million dollars with a twirl of his cane. Several friends now came foward to provide a thousand-dollar bond for his bail. He couldn't have scraped together the money on his own.

Three appeals against the deportation order were turned down. And in October 1934, Ponzi went aboard the *Vulcania*, which was shipping for Italy. Reporters interviewed him in his steerage quarters. He announced that he had refused to take along his wife—the wife who had remained faithful to him over the years. Some time afterward Rose Ponzi was granted a divorce from the man who had given her a mansion, a thousand-dollar-a-month allowance—and a hoard of headaches.

Arriving in Rome, Ponzi rented a small apartment and devoted himself to the muse of literature. He planned to write his autobiography, but the title bothered him. He couldn't make up his mind whether to call it the *Decline and Fall of Charles Ponzi*—with apologies to Gibbon—or simply the *Boston Merry-Go-Round*. He solved the problem by putting aside his pen and taking up the bottle. He became an alcoholic and had an affair with an eighteen-year-old schoolgirl. Then he turned his versatile talents to politics, making pretentious pronouncements on the virtues of Mussolini and fascism. He succeeded so well in ingratiating himself into the graces of the Black Shirts, who had swindled a nation as he had fleeced a city, that he was sent to Rio de Janeiro as business manager for Mussolin's Lati Airlines. At sixty he had regained the charm and exuberance of the young fellow of twenty-two years before. He was once again a fast man with tips at a dinner party and a number-one host to the carriage trade.

But alas, this bubble broke. The war ended. Mussolini was disembowled at Lake Como, and Ponzi was turned out to harvest peanuts instead of emeralds.

For a time after the war he eked out a living as a translator. But things changed from bad to worse. He grew blind in one eye and became partially paralyzed. He was committed to a charity ward in Rio. When a reporter came down to interview this Napoleon of swindlers on his miserable little St. Helena, he declared bitterly:

"I guess the only news people care to hear about me now is my death."

He died on January 15, 1949, at the age of sixty-six. He left seventy-five dollars, barely enough to pay for his burial.

CONVICT NO. 16*

ONE afternoon in 1921 a telephone call was put through to Scotland Yard. A man spoke into the mouthpiece: "Hello, I've information for the police. A fellow in possession of some stolen treasury bonds will try to dispose of them at a broker's shop in the Strand at four-thirty this afternoon. I guarantee that it will be worth your while to investigate." The caller gave the name of the brokerage, and then a slight cough was followed by a click of the receiver.

Now a great many calls come to the Yard daily from tipsters volunteering information about murders, kidnaping, cat burglars, and bucket-shop swindles. Most of them are fakes. A few, however, are worth following. The Yard had a hunch that this was one of them.

Accordingly, an inspector was sent down to the brokerage in question at four-thirty that afternoon. When he entered the office he saw immediately that he had not been sent on a wild-goose chase. A tall, barrel-chested individual was seated at a desk writing out a form required for cashing a bond.

The inspector tapped him on the shoulder. "I want a few words with you."

The fellow glanced up with a quizzical expression which immediately gave way to a look of frank hostility.

"What for?"

The inspector helped himself to two bonds lying on the desk. He examined them carefully. Each was made out for five hundred pounds.

"Will you identify yourself, please?"

"Say, what is this, anyway?" the other blurted out. "I've done nothing wrong. You've no right to question me."

The inspector scrutinized him critically. "I'm sorry, but we've

*This is a true story; however, the names of the leading characters have been fictionalized.

received a report that these are stolen bonds. You can prove you are the legitimate owner simply by answering a few questions. The whole matter can be cleared up in a minute."

The fellow glared with resentment. "Look here, I won't be badgered. I'm no criminal. And if you don't mind, I'll go my way." He stood up abruptly.

"There's no need to get into a feather over this," replied the officer calmly. "I'm not going to interfere with your cashing of these bonds—if you are the owner. I'm simply asking you to identify yourself."

The man considered this for a moment and said, "I know my rights. You can't bully me into anything!"

"In that case," declared the officer, "I'm compelled to take you before a magistrate." He gripped the man's shoulder. "Come on, now."

The officer took the suspect to the Bow Street Police Court, and here the stranger defied the judge. He absolutely refused to give his name or any other information about himself. As a result, he was booked on suspicion of possessing stolen bonds and ordered to Brixton Jail to await a further hearing.

Protesting loudly, he was herded into a police van along with an assortment of other prisoners. He hunched up awkwardly in a corner. His face was purple with anger. He muttered explosively to himself as the Black Maria swung into the Strand and along Charing Cross, turning finally into Brixton Road and passing through the gates of the jail. He was lined up with the other prisoners in the reception room, handed a chunk of bread and a mug of hot tea. Then he was marched to the desk of the warder. Once again he refused to divulge his name. His physical characteristics and personal belongings were recorded. He bathed, was given a comb and brush; and he donned a khaki uniform with the number B138. Finally he was shown into a cell furnished with nothing but a bed and a stool.

And now a curious thing happened. As soon as Prisoner B138 found himself alone, his manner changed abruptly. Gone was his posture of innocence, his boiling rage. His face relaxed into an expression of supreme satisfaction. He stood up, stretched his arms, and shook with laughter.

The following afternoon he was taking his exercise in the prison yard when a fellow inmate nudged him and whispered, "What are you in for?" They were strolling along the path of

a huge circle, the outer of three concentric rings around which forty prisoners were being sent through their paces by the guards.

"I'm in for stolen bonds," Prisoner B138 answered in a low voice.

For a few moments they walked in silence. Then the other fellow whispered, "How did they nab you?"

"The police were tipped off. They got me at the broker's."

The other made a sympathetic little murmur. "Too bad. Do you know who spilled the beans?"

Prisoner B138 halted for an instant and swallowed his breath. "I gave the tip."

The other started at him incredulously. "You tipped off the police!"

"I phoned them up and told them to be at the broker's at a certain hour. . . . I planned my own arrest!"

The other took a long look at him to decide whether he was spoofing, but the man's face and tone were serious. "Good God, are you crazy?"

Prisoner B138 shook his head. "You wouldn't think so if you knew the facts. I've got a certain matter to attend to." His eyes narrowed. His lips grew severe. With a sudden impulse he grabbed the other's arm. "Look, fellow. Something big is in the wind; I don't mind telling you. I'm not gambling for a bob." Then, just as suddenly, he released the arm and lapsed into silence. He volunteered not another word as he walked along.

Later that afternoon, as the shadows of twilight slanted into his cell, he asked for a pen and a sheet of writing paper. His request was granted. He sat down on his bed, placed the stationery on the stool, and wrote a brief letter:

MY FRIEND:

Here's letting you know that I'm in Brixton Jail for trying to unload two Imperial Club Bonds. What do you think of that? I demand that you come to the Bow Street Police Station to give evidence against me at my hearing. Do you understand? I demand that you prosecute. *If you do not, I am very likely to be set free. And that would make you very happy indeed. Wouldn't it?*

Best of luck,
TOBY SHARN

He wrote an address on the envelope, sealed the letter, and then looked at his hands. They were the callused hands of a worker, a man who had swept streets, painted houses, and inked a press for a living. And now they had written a challenge to one of the greatest names in England.

He threw back his head in a long, low chuckle.

There was a man in England these days whose face appeared on billboards from Land's End to John o'Groat. One couldn't take a train without seeing this face in all its impressiveness every few miles along the way.

It was a heavy-jowled countenance, featuring fascinating blue eyes set under prominent brows, and a tenacious, sensual mouth. The scowls of this face were more charming than other men's smiles.

Hercules Roland, M.P., settled back in his private compartment and beamed with satisfaction as he looked out upon duplicates of this face through the windows of the speeding Cornish-Riveria Express. Each time he passed a billboard he took a healthy swallow from a bottle of the Cordon Rouge 1906 he always carried on such rides. These were his features frowning back at him, the man of the hour, adored by millions of common folk, the man who after years of struggle had finally reached fame.

At the next railroad junction Hercules Roland, if he desired, could alight and find the stand piled high with copies of the newspapers he owned—the *Sunday Post News,* the *Universal Times,* the *Courier-Dispatch,* the *National Illustrated,* the *Island Review.* The editorials under his signature were a journalistic bible for humble families the length and breadth of England. Every sentence he wrote—or had his ghost men write for him—swayed the minds of millions.

During the late war Hercules Roland had played the role of a Messiah for the masses. He prided himself on having given England what it most needed to carry it through the ordeal—a religious conscience. Even today people still spoke reverently about the inspiring articles he had written. The one, for instance, castigating the Hun, under the heading "Who Killed Santa Claus?" had stirred the nation to its depths. The public still fondly recalled the time he had visited the trenches; remembered the incomparable photograph of this dumpy little person

eating doughnuts with the Tommies, his leonine head encased in a helmet, that afterward appeared over articles entitled "What General French Told Me," and "What I Told General French."

He had delivered recruiting speeches before overflow audiences. Those who had managed to get into Albert Hall or the London Opera House, after hours of waiting, would never forget the experience of those meetings. As the massed bands struck up a marching tune and the lights went low, the top-heavy little man walked onto the stage in that comical pigeon-toed gait of his; and when he boomed forth in a golden voice that England was fighting to liberate the masses of mankind from poverty, thousands wept under his spell.

No wonder H. R.'s constituency had sent him to Parliament when the war was over. And small wonder, with his marvelous gift as a speaker, that the House of Commons was crowded to capacity whenever it was announced on the indicators that he would speak. Even though H. R. spent a good deal of his Parliamentary career at the bar of the House, drinking his favorite "bubbly," it must be admitted that he was a vigorous champion of the common people in debate. His admirers compared him to Richard Cobden and other great social reformers. And though it must be confessed that much of the wild cheering that arose when he walked to and from his seat in the House came from the lips of his hired *claqueurs,* still his unsalaried worshipers were many.

And now, as H. R. sat in his private compartment traveling to keep a speaking engagement in Scotland, his thoughts were busily concerned with the best means of organizing his worshipers to win further victories for him. In the offices of the *Island Review* the most brilliant journalists he could buy were even at this hour at work hammering out editorials on the virtues of a new independent party he had recently launched. Its motto was "Roland and Regeneration." Even now posters were being prepared for every town in England and hand-picked candidates were being groomed for the by-elections. On the strength of this party, Roland hoped to ride to the highest office in the land—the office of Prime Minister.

H. R. glanced gratefully at his private secretary, who sat opposite him, prepared to read the telegrams that had been collected from the previous station. Hyde was his right arm. He didn't know what he would do without this secretary who

prepared the schedules for his lecture engagements all over the British Isles; who suggested many of the ideas for his speeches and did much of the necessary research; who directed his political campaigns. Why, Hyde even dressed him in the morning and undressed him at night; for at sixty-three H. R. had grown too stout to manage this comfortably for himself. And, besides, this secretary provided companionship for his lonely hours. H. R., for all his fame, was an isolated man.

"Well, Hyde," he announced in his abrupt way as he settled deeper into his chair, "I see you have a load of correspondence for me. When do we reach Edinburgh?"

"At nine in the morning, H. R. The Lord Mayor will meet us at the station."

"Fine. When we arrive," Roland added with sudden enthusiasm, "you must send a wire to Mariakerke. I'm planning to take my stable over for the Belgian Grand National this season, and I want the same suite of rooms reserved for my party as last year. . . . Hyde," he continued, with mischief in his eye, "how about coming along and taking a flutter on the races?"

"You know I'm not interested in the sport, H. R. I don't know a form chart from a bottle of Cordon Rouge."

It was true. Here was an activity of Roland's life which the squeamish Hyde was unable to share. The old man was certainly one of the most passionate devotees of the turf England had ever seen. And even this he turned to political account. Hyde would never forget the stunt H. R. had worked during an election in Shrewsbury. At the climax of the fight for his seat he had marched his string of horses through the streets, each ridden by a jockey wearing his colors—vermilion, black, and white—and each saddled with a loincloth announcing, "Vote for my owner." The people loved this touch. H. R. was overwhelmingly elected.

Roland looked out into the gathering twilight, punctuated here and there by the light from a dwelling. Then he said wearily to Hyde, "Let's get on with the correspondence."

Hyde cleared his throat as he selected a telegram from the pile on his lap. "Here's a wire from Lisa, H. R. She recommends several changes in your editorial for next Sunday's *Post News*."

He always handled the subject of Lisa with the utmost diplomacy. Lisa was the major woman in H. R.'s life. He had

met her many years ago when she was the star of a musical-comedy. After a rather embarrassing scuffle with her husband, which took place outside of the Imperial one evening and made all the morning editions, H. R. had lured her from the stage and had established her as his mistress and the unofficial queen of his journalistic empire. Because of her influence over him, she shaped many of his newspaper policies. Largely through this musical-comedy star's intuition, he had been able to reach the minds of his readers with the tabloid sensations they hungered for.

Roland glanced at the telegram, frowned, and then put it aside. Then Hyde and he plunged into the welter of mail that plagues an important man. They worked into the wee hours of the morning.

Alone afterward in his compartment, trying desperately to snatch a few hours of sleep before another strenuous day, Roland reviewed in his mind a debate he had waged with himself dozens of times during these last few years. "Traveling a thousand miles weekly around the country, stumping for candidates, worrying about the circulation of my newspapers, has made me a tired old man. Isn't it high time I retired to await the Lord's call?" Yet even as he drifted into sleep he knew deep within him that he would retire only when he had ceased to live.

He was up early next morning. By the time the train reached Edinburgh he had shaved and breakfasted. As he stepped from the train, and the crowd sent up a solid roar of welcome, he immediately perked up with exhilaration. No matter how tired he was in body and spirit, his contact with the people charged him with new vitality. He exulted in the parade to the city hall; he demonstrated rare form in an after-dinner speech; he exhibited his old dynamic self to the mobs that acclaimed him.

That evening, from a platform packed with high dignitaries, he delivered a major address on the need of social-security legislation. Once again he was the old crusader, the man who throughout his life had been branded a socialist and worse by his enemies and idolized by the lower-income groups. He spoke with all the eloquence that the ancient prophets possessed when they fought for the underprivileged. The audience cheered themselves hoarse.

After the address he returned to the station to take the

express for London. At the last instant, as he was about to board the train, he was handed a special-delivery letter that had been forwarded to him. It read:

MY FRIEND:

Here's letting you know that I'm in Brixton Jail for trying to unload two Imperial Club Bonds. What do you think of that? I demand that you come to the Bow Street Police Station to give evidence against me at my hearing. Do you understand? I demand that you prosecute. *If you do not, I am likely to be set free. And that would make you very happy indeed. Wouldn't it?*

Best of luck,
TOBY SHARN

H. R. drew a deep breath and read the message again to make sure that his eyes were not deceiving him. He entered his compartment. Hyde was already waiting for him, ready to attend to his slightest need.

"What do you think of this?" he asked as he handed over the letter to his secretary.

Hyde examined it. "So Sharn's in Brixton Jail."

"Sharn is a fool!" exploded Roland.

"The man is no fool, H. R. It is dangerous to underestimate him."

Roland looked his secretary squarely in the eye.

"Well, what shall we do about him?"

Hyde remained silent. He couldn't bear to express what he felt—that H. R. was on the verge of ruin.

Seven days after being committed to Brixton, Toby Sharn was summoned from his cell to the reception office.

"You are going before the magistrate for a hearing," the warder announced. Once more Sharn's large body bent itself double into the Black Maria, and he was jolted and bumped along the Strand to the Bow Street Police Station.

The hearing was a dramatically brief one. The black-robed magistrate glared down upon him severely and declared, "You are discharged for lack of evidence." The prisoner stood without making a move, as if he had not heard.

"You are dismissed," repeated the judge.

"But I don't want to be discharged. I want a trial. I have something important to expose before the nation."

But the bailiff grabbed him roughly by the shoulder. "Come along, now." He showed him to the door. And so Toby Sharn went home with his secret unrevealed.

Sharn was a sportsman. For years he had played the horses. He was intimate with the leading bookmakers. As a matter of fact, he had installed a system which enabled him to flash the reports of the races minutes before the newspapers published them. He had acquired the nickname of "Stop the Press" Toby. With the money he made on the turf he had purchased a press in Liverpool and did a large business printing bookmaker's tickets.

It was through his turf connections that he had first met Hercules Roland, during a vacation in Lucerne. Lucerne, a beautiful Swiss resort town surrounded by snow-tipped mountains, was a gambler's paradise. It was the headquarters for the men who ran the great continental sweepstakes. Sharn read in the press that Hercules Roland had arrived to investigate the sweepstakes in which many thousands of Englishmen had invested their shillings, and that he was staying at the Hotel National, famous for its cellars of Cordon Rouge.

On an impulse, Sharn decided to obtain an interview. He visited the Hotel National one morning, and had no trouble identifying the stubby little dignitary as he waddled through the lobby. When Sharn introduced himself and made known his racing background, Roland became immediately interested. He invited him to his room for a chat.

"You know," H. R. announced in his booming voice, "I've come here to look into the sweepstakes. They have taken a great hold on the imagination of the public, and I want to find out whether they are run honestly. If they are not, I shall expose them in my newspapers and run these gamblers off the face of the earth. I'm going to protect the pockets of the people."

As the champagne flowed, their talk drifted to various experiences of the turf. They discussed selling platers, trainers, and the next Derby. Roland discussed his stables with enthusiasm.

This mutual interest led to other meetings. A friendship resulted. Early one morning, while lecturing in Birmingham, Roland summoned Sharn to his hotel. Sharn arrived to find his

friend in bed. Very frequently Roland conducted business before rising.

He gave the printer a shrewd look. "You recall, Sharn, my interest in sweepstakes? Human nature being what it is, men will always put money into a gamble. However, I've hit upon a method that will force these sweepstake operators to toe the mark. What do you think of my going into business myself? If I throw the weight of my prestige into it, I can at least persuade thousands of English to put their money into an honest gamble. I can keep my countrymen away from the wolves."

"It's a fine idea," agreed Sharn.

"Yes, it's an excellent way to clean up the entire business, a method typical of the Roland boldness and imagination," H. R. said without a blush. "By the way, what do you think I ought to charge for a ticket?"

"Two shillings and sixpence. Ten tickets for a pound."

"Splendid!" Impulsively, Roland placed a pudgy hand on Sharn's shoulder and said in a persuasive tone, "Do you know, Sharn, I think the world of you! I'd like to have you in my stable."

Toby Sharn deferred action on this opportunity to toil in the great crusader's stable. Instead he remained on the side lines, watching H. R. plunge into the sweepstakes business with a great deal of fanfare. Roland launched the Island Review Sweepstake and followed it with the Great International, the Empire, and the Universal Sweep. His press beat the drum faithfully for each event.

Then one day Sharn came across a story in Roland's newspapers about a certain Madame Dubois, a sweep winner. Madame Dubois, it was stated, was a poverty-stricken widow of Le Mans who had been raised to the throne of fortune by gaining a first prize of twenty-five thousand pounds. She was photographed in the gown she had worn years before as a bride. It was claimed that she was flooded with marriage offers as a result of her sudden climb to wealth.

Sharn for many months had been troubled with suspicions about Roland, and now he played a hunch. He hired a former Scotland Yard inspector to go to France and investigate Madame Dubois.

The man embarked on a long, painstaking search and finally found the aged lady. She was living, not in the comfortable

surroundings that twenty-five thousand pounds should have ensured her, but in one of the poorer suburbs of Paris. When asked about the money she had won in the sweeps, she shrugged her shoulders. She had never heard of the sweepstakes. She knew nothing about horses.

"But wait," she added. "Perhaps you are referring to another matter. Not long ago my brother, Raoul, visited me from England. He told me he had taken out a lottery ticket for me and that I had won two hundred and fifty pounds." Her eyes shone. "Imagine that! Two hundred and fifty pounds! You have no idea what this money, little as it is, has done for me." Her hands trembled as she spoke.

Further investigation revealed a startling bit of evidence. Madame Dubois's brother, Raoul, was a close friend of Hercules Roland!

Now Sharn knew the truth. The great H. R., who wore the mantle of piety, was a common crook! Hoodwinking the public with a crusade against gamblers, he was running sweepstakes more fraudulent than any conceived by the fraternity he was "exposing." He had transferred thousands of pounds into his own pockets, and he had arranged for nominal prizes to be given to his personal friends.

And since he was a swindler in sweepstakes, what about his other numerous activities? Did they not require the most careful investigation? Was it not logical to assume that he had perpetrated even more audacious frauds?

Toby Sharn was well aware of the tremendous problems that confronted him. So far he had collected enough evidence to send an ordinary man to jail. But Roland was not an ordinary man. He was surrounded by a powerful battery of newspapers, idolized by millions, a leader of an influential political party. His enterprises involved the lives and fortunes of numerous dependents. With his wealth he was able to suborn lawyers, pay witnesses to commit perjury, blackmail editors who dared whisper a word against him. Too many influential men were tied up with his dealings to permit him to go under without a fierce struggle.

Suddenly, however, Sharn was seized with an inspiration. The mightiest empires, impervious to external assault, have collapsed under sabotage from within. Roland had declared that he would like to have him in his stable. Very well. He would go to work

for him. And *how* he would work! From his vantage point he would quietly amass evidence until the proofs of H. R.'s criminality were overwhelming. Then he would force the showdown!

And so Toby Sharn assumed the role of collaborator. Not that he had a hand in any of Roland's pickings, but he listened to his schemes. He measured the man as a boxer appraises his opponent before what he hopes will be the knockout punch.

Frequently Sharn visited Roland at the Swan's Nest. Here, in his million-dollar mansion overlooking an artificial lake, with his sleeves rolled up in a game of billiards, or sitting on the terrace fronting the Downs where his horses ran, the great man would shed the dignity and haughtiness that had impressed a Lord Chancellor and became his genuine self. There was something about Sharn's earthiness, his glowing vitality, that struck a response in H. R. On these informal occasions Sharn got many a priceless glimpse into the Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde workings of Roland's amazing mind. Cynical beyond belief in his personal views, H. R. seemed driven by a divine spirit when he appeared before the people. Although privately he confessed to being an atheist, in public he hinted freely that the voice of God guided his tongue and his pen.

During the war this synthetic mysticism reached supreme heights of expression. The public, under his magnetic spell, responded to him ecstatically. He organized a bond drive to collect a large sum of money for the war effort. He announced through his newspapers that all subscribers would hold tickets in a giant lottery. The lucky winner of the draw would gain a substantial prize in Imperial Bonds.

He stumped the length and breadth of England under the Union Jack, with volunteers dressed as soldiers and sailors to add to the emotional content of the scene. Few people who heard him could resist this appeal by the man who had visited the trenches and held the hands of the Tommies as they passed into eternity. Millions of pounds poured into the coffers of the Roland Imperial Bond Club.

After the draw was made for the prizes, Roland summoned Sharn to his flat in Pall Mall. Sharn had lent H. R. large sums of money from time to time and thus far he had received no payments. Roland opened his remarks casually with a very able

discussion of the recent antiques he had purchased—he was a passionate collector—and then he came to the main point of business.

"Look, Toby, I believe I owe you some money." An expression of infinite subtlety came into his face. "Tomorrow I'm publishing the winners of my Imperial Bond Lottery. I'm happy to let you know that you've won third prize—a thousand pounds."

Sharn gripped the table. He remembered Madame Dubois and the sweepstakes. The showdown was at hand.

"Thank you, H. R. I am flattered that you think enough of my friendship to pay your debt to me out of the pockets of the British people!"

For a split second Roland was taken aback. But he quickly regained his poise. "What are you driving at, Sharn?"

"Nothing much, H. R. I'm merely suggesting that you have exploited the Union Jack to swindle the public out of a million pounds!" Sharn paused. "The time has arrived for the truth, Roland. I've spent my earnings to gather evidence against you. I have hired investigators to cover the continent following up leads. They have interviewed your victims, checking on every detail. And now I have pieced together the whole, formidable truth. Others have suspected fragments of it. But I have the entire record in my hands."

Roland reached for a bottle of Cordon Rouge. He uncorked it, poured two drinks.

"Will you have a nip with me, Toby?"

Sharn took a step backward. The man's audacity almost unhinged him. But in an instant his nerves were steadied. "You have run crooked sweepstakes, Roland, and you have defrauded fifty thousand Englishmen with your Imperial Bonds. But these are mere episodes in your career. Shall I give you the true biography of Hercules Roland—the one that has been so successfully hidden from the public?"

Sharn paused for breath.

"At thirty you were already a millionaire. The *Financial Times* printed your picture among the great financiers of the century. What a joke! You made your fortune selling shares in Australian gold mines that existed for the most part only in your imagination. With your plunder you bought a chain of newspapers, and immediately you launched a drive against

swindlers, bucket-shop operators, quacks of all descriptions. Here again you fooled the public. Little did the people who congratulated you suspect that, behind the mask of the crusader, you were actually blackmailing businesses into paying you tribute money under the threats of vilification and 'exposure' in your press. For years you cold-bloodedly extorted money from one of the leading banks of England, and as a result you were given carte blanche power to draw upon the people's deposits!

"But this wasn't nearly enough to satisfy your greed. You groomed yourself for Parliament. And the moment you entered the House of Commons you used your prestige to gather more millions underhandedly. You embarked on a systematic campaign to swindle old men in their dotage and youngsters who had just come into their inheritance. You sold them shares in everything from bankrupt corporations to dried-up canals. For one company alone you forged ten million shares. On two occasions when incriminating records concerning these swindles —evidence that could have sent you into penal servitude— reached the hands of a lawyer, you hired your friends in the underworld to break into his office and destroy them.

"You weren't content, however, to confine your depredations to the wealthy. At the very moment you made speeches in the House of Commons championing the cause of the underprivileged, you were robbing the poor of their life's savings. A number of workmen, when they awoke to the truth about you, committed suicide. *Their* tongues were silenced. One poor devil sent you a note pleading for the return of the money he had invested in your worthless shares. 'For God's sake,' he begged, 'let me have some evidence that you are not a heartless thief.' He received not a pence. There was no use for him to go to the authorities with his story. Who would believe that he had been swindled by the Man of the People!"

Roland's face was the picture of blandness; not a muscle moved. "All this is extremely interesting, Sharn. But who is going to believe this fantastic story?"

"The British people will believe me."

"You are a fool," replied Roland contemptuously. "An ungrateful fool! I picked you out of a printer's plant. Through me you have associated with the great of the earth. And now you have lost your senses. Do you suppose that I will permit

you to raise your sniveling head against me? I have ways of dealing with blackmailers!"

"I'm not blackmailing you, Roland. I wouldn't surrender my evidence to you for the fortune you have swindled out of others."

"Here, take your bonds, and get out!"

Sharn held out his hand. "I will accept them, Roland. They certainly don't belong to *you!*" He took them and departed.

Sharn soon discovered that he was shivering a lance against a mountain. He bombarded the entire membership of the House of Commons with letters alerting it to the menace of Hercules Roland. He received no response. He wrote to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Attorney General, with the same negative result. No printer had the courage to publish his attack. No newspaper would print it. He visited every large legal firm in London, requesting a lawyer to bring action in the courts. They would have nothing to do with it. One of the most eminent counsels in the country told him, "Leave Roland alone!" It was only too apparent that the evidence Sharn had so painstakingly collected was viewed with the greatest skepticism. But Sharn refused to quit.

He cudgeled his brains for some way in which to bring Roland into the open. Then he recalled the war bonds H. R. had so contemptuously handed him, and a plan of strategy occurred to him. It was a daring scheme, but Sharn had the blood of the adventurer. He decided to arrange for his own arrest on the suspicion of trying to unload stolen war bonds. He hoped that a probe by the police would lead to a full-scale investigation of the Roland Imperial Bond fund from which these bonds were obtained and, finally, to an exposure of Roland himself. But Sharn's strategy, as the reader has learned, misfired. No evidence was presented against him for an indictment. He was released, a thoroughly disappointed man.

And then, with startling clarity, a new scheme occurred to him. The more he thought about it, the more it appealed to him. He felt a thrill of excitement, the exhilaration of the gambler about to play for his life.

He confided his plan to a close friend. The man's face grew grave as he heard the details.

"You're taking a frightful chance, Toby. It's very much as though you were attempting to capture a brigand by offering

yourself as a target for him to shoot at. Roland is a desperate man. Have you thought of what will happen if the scheme miscarries?"

"Either I accomplish what no man in England has been able to do in thirty years—beat Roland—or else I go down to ruin. I'm willing to offer myself for the experiment."

Without more ado, Sharn put his scheme to work. He addressed an open letter to "Dear Hercules" in which he exposed him as a swindler. He bound this letter at his own expense under the heading *The Downfall of Hercules Roland*. He had five thousand copies printed; but since he found no one who dared to sell the pamphlet in the streets, he bought a black mask, went out to a small town in the Midlands, and hawked them himself. It was market day. The square was crowded with people. A mob gathered around this well-dressed man in the black mask and, out of curiosity, bought his pamphlet. People love sensational presentations. The sale of the pamphlet reached landslide proportions. Sharn disposed of a thousand copies singlehandedly, and news sellers whose desire for a profit overcame their timidity now volunteered to sell the pamphlets on their own.

Sharn proceeded to flood the country with his open letter. He bought a secondhand Ford and drove three assistants to Liverpool. Here the four men in their black masks stood at the busiest intersection and sold five thousand pamphlets in two hours. For two days the pamphlets sold like hot cakes. Then Sharn traveled to Manchester, and from thence to Cardiff, where the Labor party was holding its annual Congress amid vast crowds. From Cardiff, Sharn took his pamphlets to Bath, Exeter, and Plymouth. And finally he prepared an assault on the great city of London, the seat of Roland's headquarters. He sent an assistant to London, armed with a quarter of a million pamphlets. This lieutenant commenced in the West End and the area around the House of Commons and proceeded systematically to cover every crowded thoroughfare in the metropolis.

For days now Sharn had anxiously awaited Roland's counteraction, the blow he had taken such pains to provoke. And then at last it came. Even before he was notified in person, Sharn read in the newspapers that a warrant had been sworn out against him for criminal libel! Sharn telephoned the police

that he was ready to surrender, and delivered himself up to Scotland Yard.

So far the plan was working. The trap had been well baited. But would it spring shut? He had forced Roland to the wall. He had compelled him to take action through the courts. Once inside the court, Sharn thought it reasonable to assume, Roland could be lured into the witness box to testify against him, particularly since this alone would really justify his accusations in the eyes of the judge and jury. However, Roland's entrance into the witness box could prove his undoing. Under cross-examination by an astute attorney, this man who had evaded giving direct answers to questions for thirty years, who had dealt in double talk and subterfuge, would be shorn at last of his weapons of oratory. He could be compelled either to admit the truth of Sharn's accusations or commit perjury, and *any admission could be used as the basis for a criminal prosecution!*

On the other hand, if Roland, subtle as he was, managed to evade the witness box and nevertheless won a conviction, Sharn himself faced the penitentiary!

In a busy section of old London stands an impressive stone building. Planted on its roof, against a background of British sky, is a bronze-gilt figure of Justice. Across the arch of its main entrance reads the command: "Defend the children of the poor and punish the wrongdoer." Officially this building is known as the Central Criminal Court. But every Englishman calls it the Old Bailey.

One morning in May 1922 the room known as Court Number One was crowded with spectators. A prisoner stood in the wide, glass-paneled dock, facing the judge. At right angles to him sat the jury. On the floor beneath the judge, and in front of counsel for the Crown and the defense, were strewn sweet herbs and nosegays of fresh flowers. This was a custom carried over from old times, when such potpourri was brought into the courtroom to sweeten the foul odors emanating from Newgate Prison, which formerly adjoined the Old Bailey.

The prisoner in the dock awaiting sentence to the penitentiary was Hercules Roland! The strategy of the plucky Liverpool sportsman had triumphed. As he had foreseen, Roland's prosecution had led to developments resulting in damaging admissions. Within forty-eight hours after Sharn's acquittal, the

government had arrested Roland on the charge of fraud! An uneducated bookmaker's printer had accomplished what all the legal minds in England had failed to do.

To the very last moment Roland refused to lose faith in his lucky star. Amid the cheers of his hired claque he entered the court magnificently attired in a morning coat and a silk hat, with a bunch of violets in his lapel. He greeted the press and photographers with his old-time self-assurance. For thirty years his golden tongue had toyed with the people. Why should it fail him now?

"It doesn't matter what evidence the Crown presents," he told his friends. "My strength lies with those twelve individuals on the jury. They will forget all the previous testimony when I begin to speak!"

So confident was he of acquittal that on the morning of the verdict he walked into court with tickets for Epsom Downs in his pocket. He planned to take the train that afternoon.

The jury debated for exactly twenty-eight minutes. Then it filed into the courtroom. The foreman stood up and declared: "Guilty."

The defendant grasped the edge of the dock. His lips tightened. But beyond this he betrayed no emotion.

The judge looked levelly at the prisoner. "Hercules Roland, you have been convicted by the jury of a long series of unparalleled frauds. You have held a high position in this country, and you might have had a monument erected by this nation inscribed with the love of the millions you so hypocritically exploited. Your epitaph could have read: 'To Hercules Roland, Friend of Man. He did great things for his country.' You had all the necessary endowments to make you immortal, all—but a heart. Hercules Roland, you are the greatest living tragedy of this era—the tragedy of what might have been. I see no mitigating circumstances for clemency. The sentence of this court is that you be kept in penal servitude . . ."

Attendants quickly closed in upon the prisoner, anticipating a sudden attempt at suicide. All morning a stomach pump had been kept in readiness to thwart any swallowing of poison. But these measures were unnecessary. The prisoner held his head high. He took one last look around the courtroom at his public, a look of mockery mingled with cynicism and defiance. The

drama had exhilarated him to the very end. Accompanied by a warder, he stepped slowly out of sight, down the stairs to the cells below. When he reached the basement he was no longer the Man of the People. He had become Convict No. 16.

THE STRANGE STORY OF GASTON MEANS

In 1938, within the plain white walls of the prison hospital at Leavenworth, a huge bulk of a man lay lifelessly on a cot that was scarcely able to support his weight. A few days before, while shining up a spittoon, this fellow had grown suddenly faint and had toppled over in a heap. The prison doctors discovered that he was suffering from a severe ailment of the kidney. To operate upon him would be risky, since he had a weak heart. But the gamble was taken—and here he lay, dead.

By the cot stood an agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who had come in the hope that on his deathbed this man would end six years of silence and reveal the solution to a mystery that had baffled the nation.

The puzzle was this: Where had this prisoner hidden one hundred and four thousand dollars? The FBI had searched everywhere for it. They had dug up every yard of the grounds surrounding his Maryland mansion. They had examined every inch of his house. They had broken through the concrete of his basement and torn down the bricks in the walls; they had ripped open the upholstery of his furniture; they had even forced open a toy bank. But they had not found the money.

It rankled in the head of this prisoner that G-men had opened a "piggy" bank. "Why didn't you let me know?" he reproached them from his cell. "I would have given you the key to it." But he had not given them the key to the location of one hundred and four thousand dollars. And even now, at the point of death, he remained silent.

This money belonged to one of the most celebrated women in America, Mrs. Evalyn Walsh McLean, the widow of the editor of the Washington *Post*. She was a millionairess, and the possessor of the fabulous Hope diamond. How this wealthy woman was parted from her money had made headlines all over America.

On the morning of March 2, 1932, Americans awoke to the tragic news that Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr., the son of the pioneer aviator, had been kidnaped from his nursery on the second floor of the Lindbergh estate at Hopewell, New Jersey, sometime between eight-thirty and ten o'clock on the previous evening, while his parents were having dinner. The twenty-month-old baby was last seen alive by his nurse, Betty Gow, at eight-thirty that evening. An hour and a half later, when she entered the nursery for a routine checkup, the crib was empty. A trail of muddy footprints led across the nursery to an open window. On the ground below were the marks of a ladder that had been planted against the wall. On the window sill of the nursery a note had been left demanding fifty thousand dollars in ransom money.

Immediately the nation embarked in the most intensive man hunt in its history. Planes and ships were pressed into service. Over a hundred thousand policemen and civilians patrolled the highways and searched through the woods of every state in the Union.

But the baby wasn't found. The New Jersey State Police and the FBI were completely puzzled. They called upon members of the underworld to use their influence to find the gang. Gamblers and gunmen were sent out to scout for the baby. But no luck.

Among the millions of Americans who were shocked by the kidnaping was Mrs. Evalyn Walsh McLean, a close friend of the Lindberghs. Her own son had, as a child, been threatened by kidnapers, and she had been compelled to keep him guarded constantly. It had made her a nervous wreck. And now she was terribly eager to help the Lindberghs. She let it be known that she was willing to furnish the ransom money herself to anyone who could establish contact with the kidnapers.

Three days after the crime a man turned up to accept her offer. He was a huge fellow with a bullet-shaped head and a breezy manner. There was a faint aroma of something too artificially sweet about him. He wore his clothes like a man dressed for a genteel burial.

"I'm Gaston Bullock Means," he told Mrs. McLean in a soft-spoken Southern accent. "Formerly I was an investigator for the Department of Justice. I know where to find the Lindbergh baby."

"You do!"

"Yes. Some years ago I got mixed up in a little bad business. I did time in the penitentiary in Atlanta." He blushed like an old maid confronted with her diary.

"A few weeks ago I walked into a little bar in lower Manhattan and met an ex-convict with whom I had been friendly in Atlanta. He told me of his scheme to kidnap the Lindbergh baby. He invited me to come in on it. You can imagine how stunned I was. I warned him to quit dreaming up such plans; they would land him in a heap of trouble. Well, I see by the papers that he didn't listen to me. Now I know I can contact him and get the child back."

"Well, this is astonishing!"

Means held up a huge hand. "One other point, Mrs. McLean. Let us keep this to ourselves. Any publicity will destroy my effectiveness."

"I would give anything to get the child back."

"Have no fear on that score. I will telephone as soon as I have established contact and let you know the terms."

"Terms?"

"Yes, the amount of ransom demanded, the place for the meeting, the time. You and I will succeed where the FBI and the police of forty-eight states have failed. Remember, Mrs. McLean, I am a former G-man who made headlines during the Harding administration. I've not only worked for the Department of Justice, I've worked as undercover man for five governments—five different governments! Have no fears. The baby will be returned to its crib."

A few days later Means visited Mrs. McLean again with the news that he had made the contact. "Everything is going splendidly. The ransom price is a hundred thousand dollars, to be paid in fifty- and hundred-dollar bills. By the way," he added, "I must ask for an additional four thousand dollars for my expenses."

Mrs. McLean went to her Washington bank, drew out the money, and was told by Means to take a trip down to her summer home in Aiken, South Carolina, where the baby would be delivered.

Without divulging the negotiations to her family or her attorneys, she drove down to her home in South Carolina with her maid to await further instructions.

They weren't long in coming. A few days after her arrival

she received a phone call from Means instructing her to give her servants the evening off, to make certain that she would be alone in the house that night. As she sat in her study that evening, the doorbell rang. Means entered accompanied by a fellow with horn-rimmed spectacles, a light brown mustache, and chestnut hair. He looked like the kind of chap who spends his life plotting new gambits on the chessboard. However, one item disturbed the picture. He wore, along with a conservative spring suit, a pair of white kid gloves which he refused to shed during the entire visit.

"Are we alone, Mrs. McLean?" asked Means.

"We are."

"This is our contact," announced Means, indicating his companion. "We'll call him Mr. Fox. Take over, Mr. Fox."

The studious-looking fellow walked over to each closet, opened the door, and inspected each interior. When he had satisfied himself that no one was within earshot, he turned to Mrs. McLean and said: "The baby is well and happy. It will be delivered tomorrow evening on the side street to the left of this house, in front of the row of cottages. Four cars will be parked against the curb. You will step up between the first two and receive the child. If anyone follows you, we will open immediately with machine-gun fire."

He paused to let this threat sink in. Then he added, "I've come here to get a good look at you, for identification. Remember, no monkey business."

As he spoke, his hands settled for a moment on a coffee table near him. He withdrew them gingerly. He made it quite clear that he was wearing gloves to prevent his leaving fingerprints.

The following night Mrs. McLean appeared at the rendezvous, but there were no cars along the curb, and no baby. Twenty-four hours later Means telephoned. His voice drooped with disappointment. "I'm sorry, but I've got bad news. It's impossible for the child to be delivered here in Aiken. This spot is too hot. A gang of hijackers has just made an attempt to steal him. The kidnapers have taken a powder for El Paso, Texas, two miles from the Mexican border. The delivery will be made there if you take a train immediately."

And so Mrs. McLean dutifully entrained with her maid for El Paso. Upon her arrival, Means informed her that a code had been established for future negotiations. Henceforth she would

be known as Number 2; Mr. Fox as Number 19; Means himself would be Number 27; and the baby was to be known as "The Book."

Once again a meeting was arranged for the transfer of the baby. Again Mrs. McLean arrived at the meeting place. Again no baby. Leaving her maid behind, on the chance that the delivery of the child would yet be made, Mrs. McLean returned to Washington and got in touch with her attorneys. By now she was convinced that she had been hoodwinked by a stout fellow with a personality that hid a stench under the fragrance of magnolias.

A close friend of Mrs. McLean's drove over to Means's home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He found the ex-government agent seated by his fireplace in a spacious living room, luxuriating in the aroma of a cigar.

"Means," he came to the point abruptly. "Where's Mrs. McLean's money?"

The big fellow looked up at him with eyes that registered frank astonishment.

"Why, I returned the money to her!"

"You *returned* it?"

"Why, yes. Hasn't Mrs. McLean told you? She called up several days ago and demanded the money. Of course I was deeply offended by her loss of faith in me. Within two weeks I would have had the child safely home. Yet what could I do? She sent a messenger for it. I met the fellow three evenings ago at the bridge in Alexandria as I was driving to Washington. It was a moonless night. He waved a red lantern in my face and said, 'I've come for Number 2's money.' I handed it over to *him*."

"Means, this is the most outrageous lie I have ever heard."

The big fellow started out of his chair with a crimson face. "Lie? I tell you we've all been swindled! I see the whole thing now. I handed the money over to an impostor!"

He bit violently on his cigar. "Well, I'll get it back for Mrs. McLean, every penny of it. Remember I'm a former investigator for the Department of Justice. And I've also worked for Germany, England, Mexico, and Brazil. In my time I've retrieved millions in stolen cash. Have no fear on that score."

Mrs. McLean's friend stood openmouthed in amazement. Then he left without a further word. Family attorneys contacted

the FBI. For several days Means was closely watched. G-men waited for the instant he would leave his Maryland estate and return to Washington, automatically placing himself within federal jurisdiction. The first occasion on which his chauffeur drove him to Washington, two agents trailed him by auto. They overtook Means on Massachusetts Avenue and made the arrest. He was indicted for fraudulently obtaining Mrs. McLean's money, placed on trial, convicted, and sentenced to fifteen years at Leavenworth.

In the meantime Mr. Fox, his confederate, was also apprehended. He was a Mr. Norman Whitaker, an Oxford man, and a disbarred lawyer who previously had been arrested for putting slugs into a pay telephone. The ransom money was never found. Means died in Leavenworth without abandoning his pose of injured innocence. He insisted to the end that the kidnapers had defrauded him of the cash. The American public was shocked and baffled by this curious man. It was aware that the Lindbergh swindle was simply the climax to one of the strangest careers in American crime.

Gaston Bullock Means was born in Concord, North Carolina, in 1879. His father was a lawyer. Whenever Means, Sr., prepared a brief for an important case he sent his son on a pony to the various county stores to buy candy, sit down by the stove and munch it while he kept his ears wide open for any chitchat about the coming trial. When the boy returned at night he would write down the information on a piece of paper. In this manner his father was able to find out which of the prospective jurors was prejudiced; and, in addition, he picked up leads for evidence which he turned to effective account.

Thus Gaston commenced his training as an investigator early in life. In his late teens he went to the University of North Carolina; and he was appointed, for two years, the superintendent of grade schools in Albemarle, North Carolina.

Then, for some unrevealed reason, he left the teaching field, took a job as a salesman for a Southern towel manufacturer, and got fired for posing on the road as the owner's son. Finally he returned to his first great passion—investigating other people's lives.

He came to New York in 1911 and met William J. Burns, the celebrated head of the International Detective Agency. "He saw

in me," declared Means afterward, "a brain of exceptional analytical power." Burns hired him as a "private eye."

From then on Means's life took on the flavor of an E. Phillips Oppenheim spy thriller blended with a dash of Edgar Wallace. He developed into a crack undercover man. He would tear every last shred of privacy from an individual under investigation. He would get to his correspondence, bribe his servants, discover his mistresses, ferret out his financial peccadilloes. Means received enormous sums of money. And he loved to show off his bank roll. Frequently, in full view of his dinner guests, he would leisurely leaf through five-hundred-dollar bills before he selected the fifty to lay down for his meal.

When the first World War broke out, the German government settled upon Means as an ideal agent. America at the time was a neutral. The Germans wished to discover which American manufacturing firms were supplying Great Britain's armament industry and which British ships were carrying the parts. The information was to provide a field day for German U-boats. Captain Karl Boy-Ed, under orders from Von Papen of the German Embassy, met Means in a restaurant in Manhattan.

"We'd like you to do undercover work for us at a thousand dollars a week."

Means wasn't the man to refuse. He didn't mind renting a suite on Park Avenue and sipping wines at the Colony. He took the job. In the basement of his home there appeared large oil paintings of the Kaiser and Frederick the Great. Once a week he visited the old Trinity Church graveyard and found his orders and bundles of cash cached near an isolated tomb.

Means bought a million dollars' worth of supplies from American manufacturers for Germany, outwitting Allied agents at every turn. But as soon as German plans menaced the security of the United States, he changed his tune. Discovering that the Kaiser was negotiating with Mexico for an invasion of America, he revealed the plot to our government; and he was instantly dropped from the German pay roll. When America entered the war, he plunged into secret-service work for the Allies. He boasted afterward that he had been assigned to confidential missions by President Wilson.

At the conclusion of the war Means returned to the Burns Detective Agency. When Burns was invited to Washington to take charge of the newly organized Department of Justice,

Means accompanied him as his right-hand man. However, he was soon head over heels in skulduggery.

A strange metamorphosis had taken place in the character of the soft-voiced Southerner. For the first thirty-eight years of his life he had been "on the square" as an investigator. Even his work for the German government, performed while America was a neutral, was technically justifiable. But shortly after this assignment his career commenced to twist off into the underworld. For the next fifteen years, even while with the government, he practiced crime with an audacity unequaled among his contemporaries. By the time he was fifty he had been indicted for almost every crime on the calendar—including murder!

In 1911, nine years before joining the Justice Department, Means rode one evening in the upper berth of a Pullman from Detroit to Chicago. Suddenly the chain broke, and he was tossed into the aisle. He severely fractured his skull and was removed to a hospital. For nine months he lay incapacitated. Henceforth he suffered sharp, almost unendurable headaches. The doctors shook their heads discouragingly. Head injuries could lead to nasty complications. In some instances, after the patient has been acting normally for years, something would suddenly snap in the brain.

For a long period everything went well with Gaston Means. Then one evening he appeared at the railroad express agency in North Carolina, carrying a heavy black trunk. "I want this mailed to Chicago and insured for fifty-seven thousand dollars."

The clerk looked at him suspiciously. "What's in it?" he inquired.

"Money," answered Means in a hushed voice. "Fifty-seven thousand dollars in cash."

The trunk was mailed to the designated address. However, the recipient was astounded to be presented with something he never expected. Upon opening the trunk, his amazement was even greater. For it contained nothing but a huge block of wood. Smelling a rat, he informed the railroad authorities.

Shortly afterward Gaston Means reappeared at the express company.

"Has my shipment arrived safely?" he asked. "I have not received any word about it."

He was told curtly that his worthless block of wood had reached its destination.

Means grew ashen. His fingers clenched. Then he managed to blurt out, "A block of wood! Are you crazy? It was money —and it has been stolen! I have enemies in the underworld who must have gotten wind of this cash. These gangsters have robbed the train and substituted a block of wood. I will sue you for every cent coming to me."

He was stopped before he went further. He was bluntly accused of trying to defraud the railroad and threatened with criminal prosecution if he persisted in his claims.

The big man shrugged his shoulders and went home. The scheme had been worth trying. He accepted failure like a gambler who braces himself for another day's play.

Shortly after he severed his connections with the German government in 1917, his work as a private investigator, which hitherto had been clear-cut and productive of results, suddenly took on the qualities of fantasy. Assigned to handle a case, he would no longer go searching for the facts. Instead he would settle back in an easy chair in his office and plot out an imaginative solution that had all the ingenious and spine-chilling complications of a top-drawer detective story. His superiors were confronted with the alternatives of rejecting his reports, which were so highly documented that they seemed genuine, or of assigning detectives to follow leads so diverse that it would actually take years to check up on their authenticity. Accordingly, Means remained unexposed.

And then suddenly he was projected into a real-life investigation that beggared even his previous fictions. It commenced as a glamorous adventure. It ended in his indictment for murder.

One morning in 1917, Means was summoned into the office of his boss. "Look here," he was told, "I have an assignment for you. Ever hear of Mrs. Maude A. King? She's the widow of James King, the millionaire lumberman. Recently she went to Europe and fell into the hands of a gang of adventurers from Monte Carlo who are out for her money. Naturally her family is up in arms. The gang has followed her back to this country, and matters have become serious. Her relatives have come to this agency seeking protection for her."

"I see. And what is my assignment?"

"You're to go down to the Beach Hotel in Chicago, where Mrs. King is staying, and save her from these swindlers. They've already run through huge sums of her money."

Means took a train for Chicago, registered at the Beach Hotel, and had Mrs. King pointed out to him. She was a stout brunette in her middle thirties with dark eyes and a florid complexion. She had fallen for the charms of a smooth-talking Englishman who had a record with the London police of having fleeced a long list of susceptible women. Assisting him were a London gambler, a bookmaker, a jewel thief, and two crooks who played the parts of a physician and a hairdresser. They plied her with liquor on an almost hourly schedule and kept her in a state of stupefaction.

Means waited for his opportunity and finally got to the widow. With great tact, he succeeded in prying her from her English Prince Charming and squired her to New York, installing her in a Park Avenue apartment near his own.

Means's boss, however, hadn't the slightest idea that he had assigned no ordinary detective to this job. The extraordinary Mr. Means had plans of his own. He had seen with his own eyes how easy it had been to rob this widow. He decided to carry on where the English crooks had left off!

Soon strange rumors were circulated through the New York society grapevine. Mrs. King was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She was obsessed by the notion that the world was filled with people out to murder her. Gossip now charged that Means, exploiting those fears, had represented himself to Mrs. King as her sole protection against a violent death.

Functioning at first as her bodyguard, he gradually gained control over the widow's business affairs. He kept her a virtual prisoner in her apartment, and secretly installed a dictaphone to record every word she spoke in his absence. He signed her checks and systematically transferred her fortune to his account. What remained, he won by rolling dice. On one occasion he collected sixty thousand dollars from the weak-minded widow.

Under terms of her husband's will, Mrs. King had inherited a million dollars. After more than half of this amount had been dissipated, Means came to her with amazing news.

"Look, Maude, I've been checking over your business affairs. And I've discovered in an old tin box you entrusted with me a will executed by your husband bearing a later date than the one

already probated. Under it he bequeaths you not a mere million dollars but his entire estate—six million dollars."

"Is it a genuine will?" asked the excited widow.

"Of course. I've had the signature confirmed by several handwriting experts. I'm going to court for you and I'll collect every cent. Of course I shall want a commission, say nine hundred thousand dollars."

Not long afterward he filed a petition for consideration of the will and took Mrs. King down to Concord, North Carolina, to have important papers signed. During their stay the widow suddenly became interested in revolvers and expressed a desire to go shooting on a range outside of town. Means and Mrs. King made up parties which engaged in target practice at Blackwelder Springs. It became quite a craze with them.

And then late one night a limousine roared down the highway and turned in through the gates of a local hospital. Out stepped Means with his brother and a friend. They summoned hospital attendants, who carried from the car the dead body of Mrs. King, with a 22-caliber bullet embedded in her skull. Means gave the police a dramatic account, interlarded with picturesque detail. He had taken Mrs. King on a moonlight shooting party, he declared, with his brother Afton and a friend, Captain Bingham, who was well known locally as a wing shot and a trainer of bird dogs. They had driven up to the woods encircling the Blackwelder Range. Alighting from the auto, they had taken two pistols with them and started through the woods on foot. Suddenly Means had become thirsty and expressed a desire to drink at a spring. Afton and Captain Bingham went on ahead while Mrs. King remained behind with him. He had placed his 22-caliber blue-steel Colt automatic in the fork of a tree; and, warning the widow not to touch it, he had stepped in front of her, lit a match, and stooped down to the water. His back was to her. Suddenly he heard a shot. He straightened up, turned around. The widow had crumpled to the ground with a cry. He lit a second match, bent down and examined her. A bullet had entered behind her left ear. He shouted for his brother and for Bingham. The chauffeur was summoned. They rushed by auto to a hospital. But it was a useless trip. Mrs. King was dead even before they had placed her in the car.

An inquest was held in Concord. The coroner pronounced a verdict of accidental death. According to the official interpreta-

tion, Mrs. King, disobeying Means's warning, had picked up the pistol from the tree and unwittingly shot herself. The case seemed closed.

But when the body was shipped to Chicago for burial, a peculiar thing occurred. While the undertaker was in the midst of embalming the body, the phone rang. He picked up the receiver. "This is the New York Police Department," said a husky voice. "Don't bury the body until a thorough investigation of it has been made. Check especially on that bullet wound behind the ear. Remember now, don't bury the body." The voice faded and the receiver clicked.

The undertaker was amazed. A little reasoning told him that this call had not originated from the police department. Perhaps it came from a crank . . . or from someone who had reason to know that Mrs. King had not died accidentally; somebody who wished to remain anonymous.

At any rate, a midnight autopsy was performed on the body. And this convinced the Chicago authorities that Mrs. King could not have died accidentally after all. The absence of powder burns alone seemed to cancel out the possibility that the pistol had been fired at short range.

The authorities now regarded Means's entire story with skepticism. Why would people go pistol shooting in the evening? By his own admission, Means had been forced to light a match to see the water he was drinking. How, then, could the party have sighted the target? Furthermore, friends now revealed that Mrs. King, far from being a pistol enthusiast, had all her life expressed a fear of firearms.

New York detectives proceeded to unearth Means's financial dealings with the widow, his transfer of her accounts, his heavy plunging in Wall Street, his staggering losses. The hypothesis was put forward that Mrs. King, after months of being victimized, had finally come to her senses, and that just before her death she had threatened Means with exposure.

Several New Yorkers testified that at a New Year's Eve party in Means's apartment the year previous, a recent murder case had been discussed. Means, it was claimed, had remarked that the murderer had blundered by poisoning his victim. If he were going to get rid of a woman, he had declared, he would lure her into the woods and arrange a death that looked like an accident.

Armed with this evidence, the grand jury indicted Means for

the murder of Mrs. King. He was brought to trial in Concord amid tremendous excitement. The town was torn between factions who supported him and those who denounced him. With eloquence and vividness, Means stuck to his story, reiterating his innocence; and he completely won over the jury. It brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty" after only fifteen minutes of deliberation!

A free man again, Means persisted in his endeavor to have Mr. King's second "will" declared genuine. He tried every legal tactic. But the case was thrown out of court. The judge hinted strongly that the will was an out-and-out forgery.

This was the man who not long afterward became a member in good standing of the Department of Justice!

As Means lay dying in the prison hospital at Leavenworth in 1938 did his thoughts go back, perhaps, to the day three years after his acquittal on the murder charge, when he entered the Department of Justice as a prohibition agent and took an oath to hunt down the liquor smugglers operating along Rum Row?

Those were the hectic days, immediately after the first World War, when millions of thirsty Americans winked at the Volstead Act; ex-saloonkeepers turned political bosses; race-track touts, tinhorn gamblers, crooks and criminals were organized into teams by underworld big shots who had entered the thrilling and dangerous business of keeping the "red eye" flowing. Bootlegging had all the glamour of old-time piracy along the Spanish Main. Private yachts converted into rumrunners carried whisky from the Bahamas to a point off the Long Island and New Jersey shores. Here, in the dead of night, the bootleg barons transferred their cargoes to motorboats and lighters mounted with machine guns, which raced for lonely beaches through a blockade of revenue cutters, often shooting it out with hijackers along the way.

These were the days when "whisper sisters" rented a respectable apartment down the block as the "front" for a speak-easy; when women left their millinery shops and tearooms and jumped into the bootleg trade, driving smart touring cars loaded with moonshine across state borders, frequently taking along their children as "cover-ups" while they hobnobbed with smugglers and corrupt political bosses.

It was an era congenial to the spirit of Gaston Bullock Means.

Upon receiving his government position, he rented a three-story house on Sixteenth Street within five minutes' walk of the Justice Department. It was a strange enough residence. The house proper was reserved for his living quarters. The basement was set aside as his place of business. In his office was a confidential filing cabinet on rollers which permitted it to be moved out of sight in a hurry. On the walls were huge maps of the United States with arrows pointing to the various warehouses where bonded whisky was stored by the government for medicinal purposes. An open fireplace against one wall was convenient for burning important papers. The windows were double-barred. Behind the office was a large "laundry room" whose washtubs were ice-packed with champagne and wines.

Means spent a great deal of time in the back yard planting flower beds to appease the curiosity of his neighbors. But at intervals, when no prying eyes were present, he packed away into a hole twenty feet deep, lined with a terra-cotta pipe, huge sums of money ranging up to half a million dollars. This was his safe-deposit vault!

His salary as a federal agent was eighty-nine dollars a week. He paid a thousand dollars a month rent for his dwelling, staffed it with five servants, drove around in a six-thousand-dollar Cadillac with a chauffeur.

How did he manage this? Not long after his government appointment, word began to be passed around the underworld that Gaston Means was a man who could "fix" things for ambitious bootleggers anxious to withdraw whisky from bonded warehouses for illegal traffic. To bootleg barons who called upon him in his basement office this government agent was engagingly direct. He rose from his desk, extended a huge simian hand in welcome, and declared: "I've got the White House in my pocket. I'm a friend of the President. I can fix anything—but a murder rap."

He then outlined a scheme by which he could obtain an order to remove whisky from one warehouse to another for "official" reasons. In transit, it could be diverted to his clients. The bootleggers, absolutely convinced, paid Means "tax" fees running into thousands of dollars and went home to await results. They waited in vain. No whisky was forthcoming. Means simply accepted the fees and moved on to his next victim. He calculated that no bootlegger who had violated the law by entering into

such an agreement would have the courage to go to the police.

For a time things went smoothly. His coffers bulged. And then finally two of his clients, defrauded out of seventy-five thousand, displayed the necessary nerve to expose him. Means was brought to trial; and although he energetically protested that he was merely the "tool" of high administration nabobs, he was sentenced to two years in the Atlanta Penitentiary.

However, no sooner was he convicted of this crime than he was indicted for a second fraud. He had convinced two promoters, who had been arrested for selling fake stock in a glass burial casket, that by virtue of his connections in the Justice Department he could have their indictments quashed. He accepted sixty-five thousand dollars for "services rendered." But the indictments were not suppressed. And the infuriated defendants crossed up Means by going to the authorities. For this felony Means was sentenced to serve an additional two years after his first term had expired.

Once again he insisted: "I am the tool of higher-ups. I have simply carried out the orders of officials who are out to frame me because I have the goods on them."

Undaunted by his change of luck, he turned to other schemes even while he was behind bars. He was infuriated against the officials of the Harding administration who had tumbled him from luxury to a prison cell, and he determined to blacken the name of the President himself by concocting as nauseating a scandal as has ever been foisted upon a public man. Upon leaving Atlanta, he wrote a book purporting to be his memoirs as an agent of the Department of Justice.

In this book, which he entitled *The Strange Death of President Harding,* he "revealed" that Mrs. Harding had confessed to him that she had poisoned her husband! He told the story with such vividness that thousands of Americans believed him. *The Strange Death of President Harding* had a sensational sale, going into many editions. Finally even Means was compelled to repudiate his tale. But in the meantime he fattened on the royalties.

This inveterate "detective" did not remain idle for a moment. After his release from prison he continued to make sensational charges against top figures in Washington. Time and again he promised Senate committees that he would come before them with trunks of documents that would "dynamite the Govern-

ment." But somehow, just before his appearances, the "documents" would vanish mysteriously.

In addition to making headlines in Washington, he continued to accept assignments as a "private eye." His formula worked as well as ever. In the late 1920s he convinced a prominent society woman that she had a powerful enemy who was out to murder her. After a prolonged search for the "killer," lasting many months, at his usual fee of a hundred dollars a day, Means finally disposed of his target by declaring that he had been "bumped off" by a rival gangster. Means actually persuaded authorities to issue a warrant for a crime that had been committed in his own head.

And so he lived by his wits up to the minute he was sentenced for the Lindbergh kidnaping swindle. That was his final stroke of business. Lying on his deathbed in the hospital at Leavenworth, he could look back upon a career that had included practically every felony known to man. Yet to the end he maintained his innocence of each and every charge.

Gaston Bullock Means was indeed an extraordinary personality. Was he a cold-blooded criminal? Were his adventures the result of a disordered brain? No one will ever know what really took place within the secret recesses of his amazing mind.

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