

orviso. The erasure of the initial might, at the outset, raise a difficulty which would render this course entirely useless. Resolving upon another mode of proceeding, he asked the jeweller by what means the ring had come into his possession; but as that individual seemed to consider the question somewhat unavailing, he purchased in, giving the full market price, and then repeated the inquiry. Having received the full market value, and some thing over, the jeweller relaxed the scruples of conscience, and writing down the name and address, upon a slip of paper, handed it to Ferrers, telling him that they were those of the person of whom he purchased the ring—Mdlle. Duberno, Rue du Helder, 24." Ferrers took the ring and the slip of paper, and departed. A few hours after found him with an agent of the prefect, dressed in an unofficial costume, in the luxuriously furnished little apartment of Mademoiselle Duberno, a rather handsome and very stylish Parisienne of some twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. The subject was very adroitly introduced by the agent of police, and the intended inquiries were asked; but it appeared that the ring had been so long in the possession of the young lady, before some casual exigence induced her to dispose of it, that she had great difficulty in bringing to mind how she came by it. "One receives so many presents, and especially so many rings," said she carelessly, "that it is almost impossible to remember any particular one." She appeared very willing to comply with the request made, but was not able; and after leaning her white forehead on her white hand for some time, she declared it was impossible she could remember who gave her the ring. "It must have been given to me by some one or other," she said, "for I have dozens of rings, I never purchased, one in my life. It is quite trouble enough to accept them. It is very likely that I have never seen the person who gave me this, either before or since. I am sure I cannot remember who it was. I only wish I could, messieurs; I should have great pleasure in obliging you." There was no reason for suspecting any intentional concealment; the manner of the lady was perfectly easy and unembarrassed. They told her that the inquiry they made involved matters of great importance, and that if she could find out whence she received the ring, she would afford a very great service to many individuals. In fine, she asked Ferrers to leave his address, and stated, that if she could possibly call to mind, in the course of a few days, or trace back the circumstance of her coming into possession of the ring she would send to him, or call upon him herself. As nothing more could be done at the present moment, they thanked the lady and withdrew.

Ferrers returned to his residence with his mind completely set upon pursuing the investigation, and already felt a strong presentiment that the mystery of the crimes in the Pas-de-Calais was about to be cleared up. He was just about to enter the door of the house, when, by a singular chance, he detected De Vernolle lounging idly along on the other side of the street. It was more than six years since he had seen him; but had it been twenty years, he could never have forgotten that strange and strongly marked face. Under an impulse, arising from the strength with which former associations had just been awakened, he stepped directly across and accosted him. De Vernolle started violently, and turned deathly pale as he perceived him; but he rallied himself immediately, and showed boldness and had out his hand with the old man's blessing, and the old grim smile.

Ferrers reminded him of the circumstances which brought about their first meeting; and asked if he still was prepared and willing to bestow a handsome reward for the discovery of the wretches who had formerly rendered the neighborhood of St. Omer and Arras so trebly notorious? "Peste!" exclaimed De Vernolle, still smiling, "is not all that forgotten yet?" Ferrers remarked, that he could not answer for other people; but, for his own part, he feared he should never be able to forget; and proceeded to relate how he had found his ring, how he had consulted the police, how he had visited and interrogated Mdlle. Duberno, &c. The smile became fixed and ghastly upon the face of De Vernolle, as he listened. "Mdlle. Duberno?" muttered he; "that is surely the name of an old friend of mine, whom, however, I have not seen for a long time. He then became silent, and abstracted to a remarkable degree. Ferrers, sanguine of his project, continued to talk of the steps he intended taking; but his companion seemed to hear nothing, seemed like a somnambulist standing dream-stuck in the street. "Come, come!" exclaimed Ferrers, with a laugh, "are you ready to hand over the five thousand francs, for I intend very shortly to demand them?" "Shortly?—how do you know—five thousand francs? Ah! I remember—yes, yes—I am always ready; though it were twice six years ago, to whomsoever made the discovery at once would I hand over the promised bounty. Succeed, Ferrers, and it is yours; and a handsome fortune, too! But wait, tell me again about that ring, or rather let me see it. Ferrers took the ring from his pocket-book and handed it to him. He examined it curiously, and then burst into a loud, scornful laugh. "Your ring!" exclaimed he; "take care or you will become the laughing-stock of the whole world! This is my ring, or rather was mine. I gave it that little witch, Duberno, some years ago. It is mine, I say, I know it by this chasing, and this, and this, and this. I would swear to it in any court of justice, or anywhere else; and my wife would swear to it too, if she were not too much of a saint to swear at all. You are quite mistaken—quite, quite, quite. This ring was mine for years, sir. It was given me by my wife, long before we were married, and my initial was engraved on the inside; when, sick of all associations of my wedded life, I resolved to part with it; I had that initial effaced; and I can take you this moment to the jeweller who did it, if you desire to be satisfied." Ferrers was completely thunderstruck by a rebuff so unexpected, and by the force and vehemence with which it was delivered. A sudden idea possessed him, however, and, without another word, he desired to be taken to the jeweller. De Vernolle conducted him rapidly to a shop in the Rue St. Honoré. In answer to Ferrers, the jeweller stated that he remembered M. De Vernolle bringing to him the ring produced, for the purpose of effacing a letter on the inside, which was done. "And what was the letter you thus effaced?" asked Ferrers in some excitement, watching sharply to see if he could detect any hesitation in the man's manner. "If I remember rightly, it was an 'F,'" answered the jeweller. Ferrers actually started with exultation and astonishment. "Well, what do you say to that?" he demanded, turning to De Vernolle. "F stands for Ferrers, not for Vernolle!"

"Bah!" sneered De Vernolle, with a mocking laugh; "this ring, my poor man, was a love gift, and my wife, who was then my sweetheart, never called me De Vernolle, but always by my christian name, Ferdinand, and as 'F.' stands for Ferdinand

it was engraved upon the ring." Ferrers' head drooped; he really could say nothing. De Vernolle seized his arm, and declared that they would go to Mdlle. Duberno, to see if she would not remember him. They did so. That lady recognised De Vernolle immediately, and at once unhesitatingly stated that it was he who had made her a present of the ring.

With a sigh Ferrers put the bauble in his pocket; the ring was remarkably like his, certainly, but it was lucky he had not taken further proceedings on a false scent.

"There!" exclaimed De Vernolle, "be grateful that you chanced to meet me! I have certainly served you much bootless trouble, and perhaps, some ridicule. Adieu! au revoir!"

The more frequently Ferrers examined the ring, the more he became dissatisfied with the position of affairs, and persuaded that it was the same of which he had been robbed. If there were two rings in the world precisely alike, were not De Vernolle and Mademoiselle Duberno as likely to be deceived as himself? He was cogitating over the matter, when the agent of police who had been with him the day before, called to know what further steps he intended to take. Ferrers related what had happened, supposing that for the present nothing more could be done. The officer, M. Perrault, was not so easily satisfied however; he appeared to take the liveliest interest in what he heard, and eagerly asked a number of questions, eliciting from Ferrers everything he knew respecting De Vernolle, pursuing his inquiries with a practised adroitness, which informed him even of the various peculiarities in the manner and behavior of the object of them.

"Well, monsieur," said he curily, after his curiosity had been satisfied, "we must look after this De Vernolle!"

"But," said Ferrers, "De Vernolle was a holder of property in the neighborhood in which the robbery had taken place, and from the first, he has been one of the most active in prosecuting the search for the offenders, and has offered, and still offers a reward of considerable amount for their arrest."

"Aye, aye," returned Perrault, with a dry smile. "If we should find he had a hand in it, after all that, it would be very astonishing, would it not? Clever man! we must try and be better acquainted with the history of him, during these last few years."

The machinery of the law was immediately put into action, to preserve a surveillance over the movements and proceedings of De Vernolle. It was found that he was living in an apartment at a house near the Barriere de l'Etoile, that he was in the habit of coming into the city in the afternoon of every day, and returning home very late, sometimes several hours past midnight; that he was a constant frequenter of some of the gambling houses in the streets branching away the Boulevards; that sometimes his means appeared to be ample, and at others, for weeks together, he was extremely poor, having hardly sufficient to procure him the necessaries of life. It was found, also, that he had been endeavoring to sell his property in the country, but as yet he had not been able to find a purchaser, in consequence of the dilapidation and disorder to which it had been brought by years of neglect. Altogether, it was ascertained that he was living an irregular, haphazard life, and that at the present time, his affairs were in anything but a satisfactory state. M. Perrault, dressed in the costume of a fashionable idler, and disguised by a pair of blue spectacles, paid daily visits to the hells frequented by De Vernolle, for the purpose of watching his behavior and character of his associates.